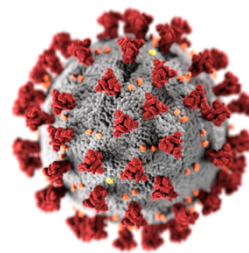
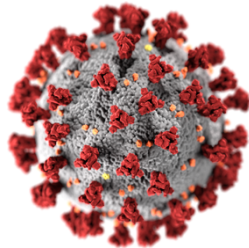




# The COVID-19 Pandemic & Inequities in Access to School Librarians

*A SLIDE Special Report*

Keith Curry Lance & Debra E. Kachel



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**The COVID-19 Pandemic &  
Inequities in Access to  
School Librarians**

*A SLIDE Special Report*

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**August 2022**

## SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation—Decline or Evolution?

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## The COVID-19 Pandemic & Inequities in Access to School Librarians

### A SLIDE Special Report

Keith Curry Lance & Debra E. Kachel

The COVID-19 pandemic has been wreaking economic, social, and political havoc globally since its onset in early 2020. One of the sectors of society affected most immediately and profoundly was public education. In March 2020—about three-quarters of the way through the 2019-20 school year—most U.S. school districts had to shut down in-person learning with very little warning, and spent the remainder of that year and the following one scrambling to put in place the technology infrastructure, logistical changes, and staff redeployments necessary for public schools to function during 2020-21. As a result, in most places, the public-school environment of 2020-21 bore scant resemblance to the pre-pandemic environment of 2018-19.

This analysis examined 2018-19 and 2020-21 data for almost 13,000 local districts compiled by the Common Core of Data project of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (At this writing, 2020-21 data are the latest available.) There are three major findings.

- The two-year interval marking the onset of the pandemic accelerated the net losses of school librarians compared to the previous two-year interval. Between 2018-19 and 2020-21, there was a net loss of more than 1,800 librarian FTEs, compared to just over 1,000 FTEs between 2016-17 and 2018-19.
- In selected states, net losses of school librarians were dramatically larger in numerical or proportional terms than in other states.
- There were further expanding inequities between districts gaining and losing librarians associated with district enrollment size, locale (city, suburb, town, rural), per pupil expenditures, majority race of students, and student eligibility for free and reduced-cost meals (a poverty indicator).
- In addition, inequities grew due to the combination of losses and gains—always resulting in net losses and greater inequities within—as well as between—categories of districts (e.g., lower-enrollment districts, those in rural areas, those serving more minority students and more students living in poverty).

Like all statistical data, these data are imperfect, though in ways that are more likely to minimize than exaggerate the pandemic's impact. For various reasons, district-level data for four states—California, Illinois, New York, and Utah—were either unavailable or unusable for this analysis. California's 2018-19 data and New York's data for both 2018-19 and 2020-21 are known to be inconsistent with other state data sources. And no data about school librarians were reported for any districts in Illinois and Utah for 2020-21. Consequently, this report is based on data for local districts in the remaining 46 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>1</sup> These and other data quality issues will be addressed in more detail in an appendix.

Because data are not available for all states and because data are only available at district level, it is impossible to provide a complete and accurate national assessment of the numbers of students and schools for which access to school librarians was impacted by the pandemic.

### School Librarians & Other Educators

Given the seismic impact of the pandemic on public education and the consequent disruptions, one might expect that the employment of all types of educators was reduced by the pandemic. Generally, across the nation, that is not what happened as detailed below for 46 states and D.C. (See Table 1 and Chart 1.)

- Between 2018-19 and 2020-21, employment of district administrators in full-time equivalents (FTEs) actually increased by 6.0 percent—an increase of more than 3,200 FTEs.
- Employment of building-level school administrators grew by 1.6 percent—an increase of more than 2,350 FTEs over the same interval.
- FTE employment of teachers was fairly static pre- and post-pandemic onset. While the number of teachers grew by over 16,000, that constituted a change of only 0.7 percent.
- Interestingly, the number of instructional coordinators dropped by only 36—a decrease of only 0.1 percent. That negligible change is noteworthy, however, given that, between 2009-10 and 2018-19, the number of instructional coordinators grew by 33.7 percent (Lance & Kachel, 2021, p. 7).

**Between 2018-19 and 2020-21, the number of school librarians reported by 46 states and D.C. dropped by more than 1,800 FTEs—a loss of 4.9 percent. (If missing data were available, the total loss would almost certainly have reached 2,000 or more.)**

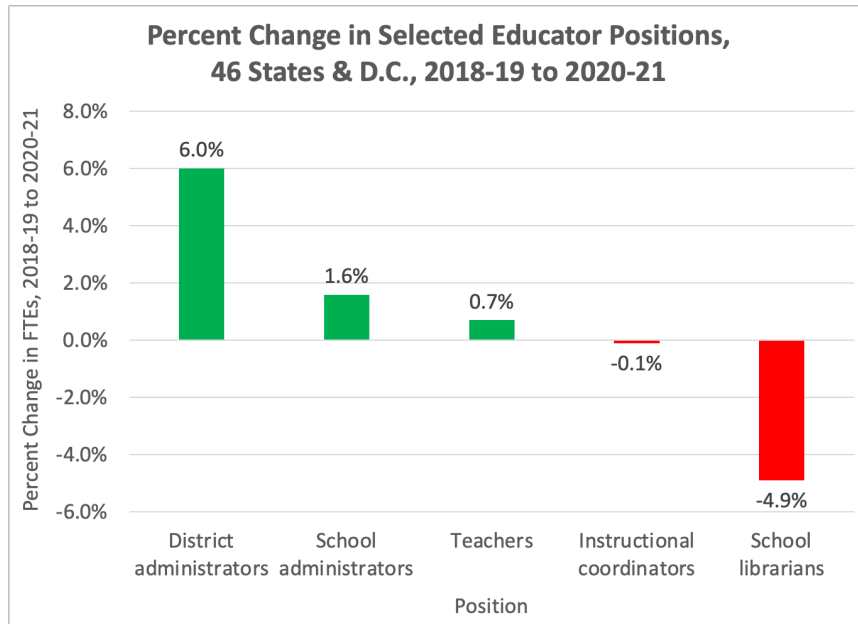
<sup>1</sup> When comparing data between years, only districts that reported both years were included. Districts that did not report for one year or both were excluded. Also excluded were districts that existed in one year but not the other.

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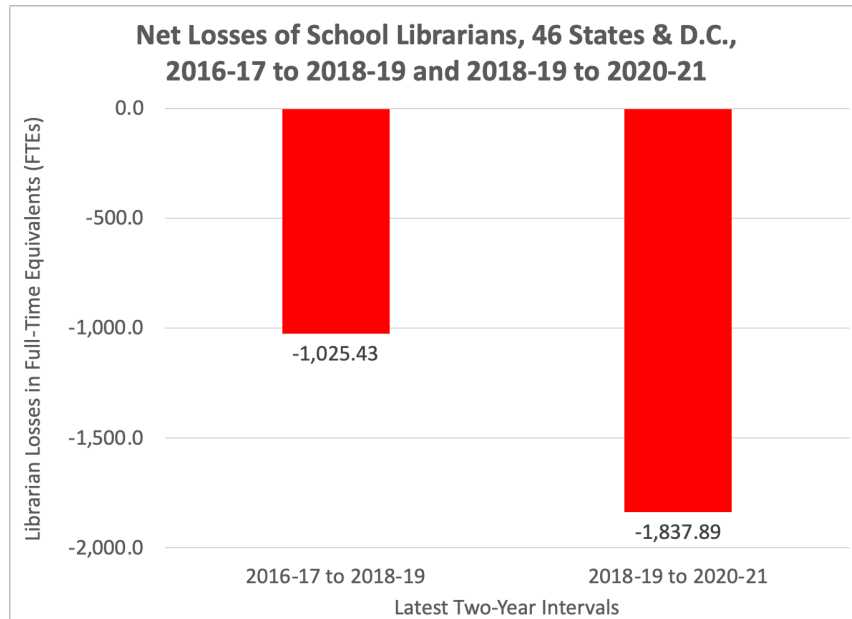
**Table 1. School Librarians and Selected Other Educator Positions in Local Districts,  
 46 States & D.C., 2018-19 & 2020-21**

| Position                   | Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) |              | Numerical Change | Percent Change |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|------------------|----------------|
|                            | 2018-19                      | 2020-21      |                  |                |
| District Administrators    | 53,558.75                    | 56,795.48    | 3,236.73         | 6.0%           |
| School Administrators      | 143,189.06                   | 145,541.51   | 2,352.45         | 1.6%           |
| Teachers                   | 2,401,744.84                 | 2,417,783.58 | 16,038.70        | 0.7%           |
| Instructional Coordinators | 62,150.01                    | 62,113.53    | -36.48           | -0.1%          |
| School Librarians          | 37,169.11                    | 35,331.22    | -1,837.89        | -4.9%          |

**Chart 1.**



**Chart 2.**



## The COVID-19 Pandemic & Inequities in Access to School Librarians

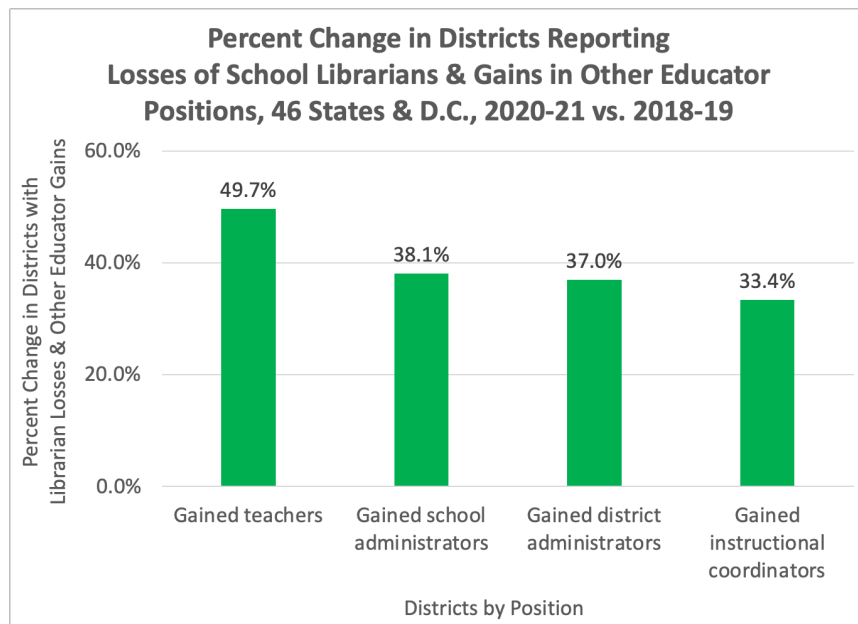
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**Between 2016-17 and 2018-19, over 1,000 FTEs of school librarians were lost. The loss of more than 1,800 FTEs between 2018-19 and 2020-21, therefore, is a loss of more than 800 additional FTEs beyond the loss experienced over the preceding two-year interval. (See Chart 2.)**

*Perspectives on School Librarian Employment in the United States, 2009-10 to 2018-19*, a 2021 SLIDE report, documented the fact that school librarian losses may be explained by shifting staffing dollars to other positions. While school librarian FTEs have been declining consistently for at least a decade, other FTEs—particularly instructional coordinators and district and school administrators—have been growing at impressive rates (Lance & Kachel, 2021, p. 5-7) Not only are other educator FTEs not declining across the board, in most cases—with the exception of school librarians—they are growing.

For the 46 states and D.C. studied here, that finding is reiterated. During the pre-/post-pandemic onset interval, of districts reporting losses of school librarians, almost half gained teachers, almost two out of five gained school or district administrators, and a third gained instructional coordinators. Whatever explains school librarian losses, it clearly is not simply a matter of funding or an overall loss of staff. (See Chart 3.)

**Chart 3.**



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**Dramatic Librarian Losses as an Educational Equity Issue**

**While it is easy to focus on the overall loss of school librarian FTEs over recent years, the more troubling findings concern the inequity of these losses by state, district enrollment, district locale, per pupil expenditures, majority race of students, and free and reduced-cost meals eligibility.**

**State**

In selected states throughout the nation, local school districts experienced larger librarian losses than districts in other states, either in absolute numbers or proportionally, after the pandemic took hold.

Three states—Washington, Tennessee, and Texas—each lost more than 100 FTEs of school librarians between the 2018-2019 and 2020-2021 school years. Eight additional states lost between 60 and 83 school librarian FTEs during the same period. Those states are: Pennsylvania, Colorado, Minnesota, Connecticut, Arkansas, New Jersey, Ohio, and Florida. (See Table 2.)

Numerical losses of school librarians were greatest in the South (Arkansas, Florida, Tennessee, and Texas) and the Northeast (Connecticut, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania). Two states each had large numerical losses of librarians in the Midwest (Minnesota and Ohio) and the West (Colorado and Washington).

**Table 2. States Ranked by Largest Numerical Losses of School Librarians in Local Districts Reporting in 2018-19 & 2020-21**

| Rank | State | Number of reporting districts | 2020-21  | 2018-19  | Numerical Change |
|------|-------|-------------------------------|----------|----------|------------------|
| 1    | WA    | 298                           | 792.59   | 1,030.83 | -238.24          |
| 2    | TN    | 144                           | 1,333.19 | 1,532.00 | -198.81          |
| 3    | TX    | 1,020                         | 3,456.46 | 3,580.77 | -124.31          |
| 4    | PA    | 499                           | 1,482.72 | 1,565.44 | -82.72           |
| 5    | CO    | 178                           | 463.16   | 542.09   | -78.93           |
| 6    | MN    | 327                           | 427.62   | 505.13   | -77.51           |
| 7    | CT    | 144                           | 618.55   | 693.15   | -74.60           |
| 8    | AR    | 231                           | 879.53   | 951.99   | -72.46           |
| 9    | NJ    | 398                           | 1,169.19 | 1,234.16 | -64.97           |
| 10   | OH    | 616                           | 688.47   | 751.12   | -62.65           |
| 11   | FL    | 66                            | 1,909.52 | 1,971.85 | -62.33           |

Between 2018-19 and 2020-2021, South Dakota lost the largest percentage of school librarians at 31 percent. Washington state and Washington, D.C., each lost 23 and 22 percent of their school librarians, respectively, during that period. At the same time, Minnesota, Hawaii, and Colorado lost one out of seven school librarians. One out of eight school librarians were lost in Tennessee, and one out of 10 by Oregon, Connecticut, and Indiana. (See Table 3.)

The West suffered large percentage losses (10 percent or more) of school librarians in four states (Washington, Hawaii, Colorado, and Oregon). Large percentage losses of librarians occurred in three states in the Midwest (South Dakota, Minnesota, and Indiana) and two jurisdictions in the South (Washington, D.C. and Tennessee). And, in the Northeast, only Connecticut lost a large percentage of its school librarians.

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**Table 3. States Ranked by Largest Percentage Losses of School Librarians in Local Districts Reporting in 2018-19 & 2020-21**

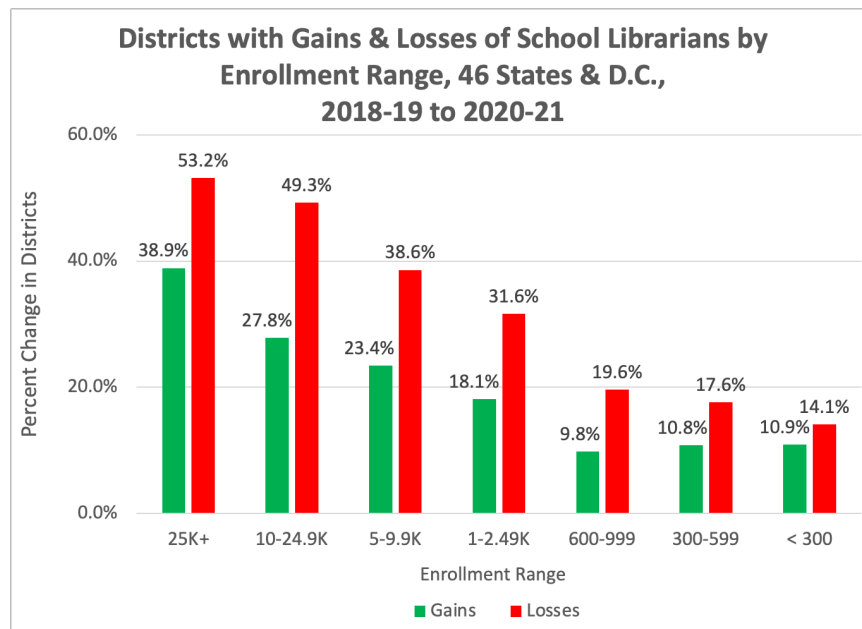
| Rank | State | Number of reporting districts | 2020-21  | 2018-19  | Percent Change |
|------|-------|-------------------------------|----------|----------|----------------|
| 1    | SD    | 149                           | 65.91    | 95.52    | -31.0%         |
| 2    | WA    | 298                           | 792.59   | 1,030.83 | -23.1%         |
| 3    | DC    | 1                             | 74.50    | 96.00    | -22.4%         |
| 4    | MN    | 327                           | 427.62   | 505.13   | -15.3%         |
| 5    | HI    | 1                             | 114.00   | 134.50   | -15.2%         |
| 6    | CO    | 178                           | 463.16   | 542.09   | -14.6%         |
| 7    | TN    | 144                           | 1,333.19 | 1,532.00 | -13.0%         |
| 8    | OR    | 175                           | 145.20   | 162.81   | -10.8%         |
| 9    | CT    | 144                           | 618.55   | 693.15   | -10.8%         |
| 10   | IN    | 288                           | 511.54   | 569.38   | -10.2%         |

**Enrollment Range**

The larger a district’s student enrollment, the greater the probabilities it would experience both gains and losses of librarians between 2018-19 and 2020-21. Of districts with 25,000 or more students, almost two out of five gained librarians while over half lost librarians. Of districts with 10,000 to 24,999 students, almost three out of 10 gained and almost half lost librarians. And, of districts with 5,000 to 9,999 students, almost a quarter gained while almost two out of five lost librarians. A major contributor to this pattern is the fact that, as a district’s size decreases, the odds of it not having any librarians to lose increases dramatically (Lance & Kachel, 2021, p. 44).

**The net result, however, is the same for every enrollment range: because each range has districts that gained and lost librarians, inequitable access to school librarians not only persisted after the pandemic struck, it became more pronounced within every enrollment range.**

**Chart 4.**



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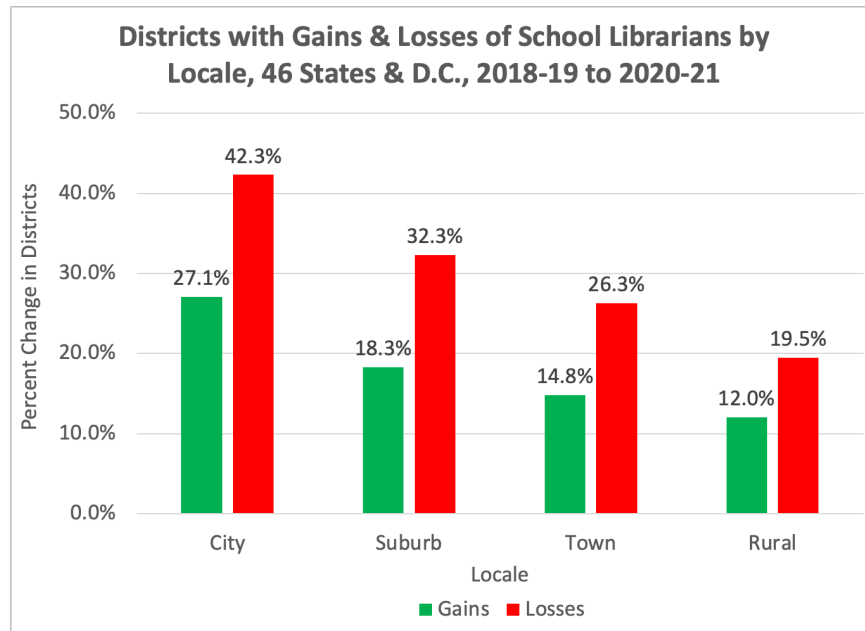
**Locale<sup>2</sup>**

In most cases, more urbanized districts and/or those that serve larger enrollments tend to employ more school librarians. Consequently, when the pandemic struck, more urbanized districts had more librarians to lose. Yet, more urbanized districts were also more likely to add librarians after the pandemic struck. Thus, once again, we see inequities both between and within locale categories.

**City districts were more than twice as likely to experience both gains and losses of librarians as rural districts—though the losses for districts in both locales surpassed the gains.**

And, in each locale category, the combination of gains and losses of librarians made the equity gap between have and have-not districts even more extreme than it was before the pandemic began.

**Chart 5.**



<sup>2</sup> The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) categorizes local 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, CCD, n.d.)



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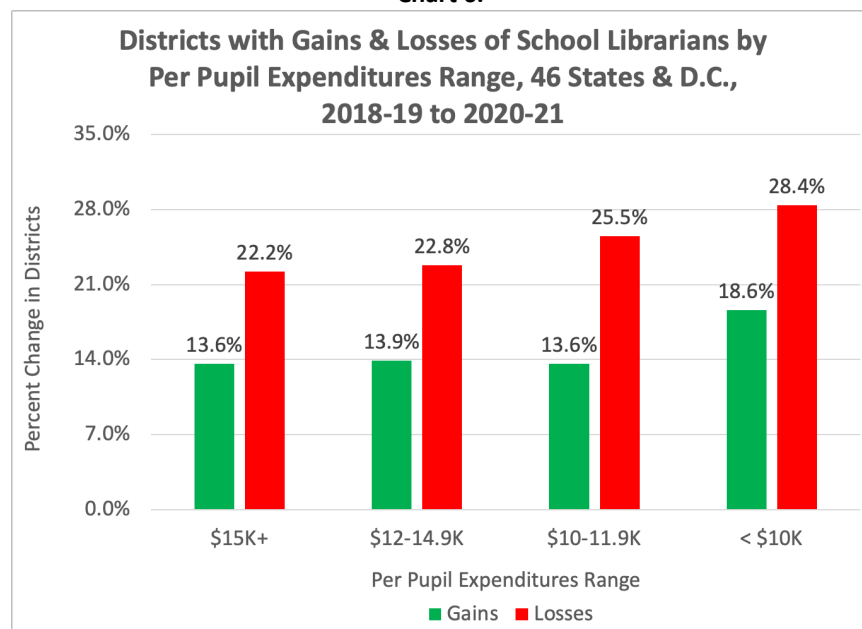
### Per Pupil Expenditures

Given the pattern reported for other equity variables (enrollment, locale, majority race of students), it is unsurprising that poorly funded districts were more likely than better funded districts to lose librarians after the pandemic began.<sup>3</sup> Intriguingly, however, the pattern for librarian gains was somewhat dissimilar to those for other equity variables. For the three groups of 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 the fourth group of districts, those spending less than \$10,000 per student, almost 19 percent gained librarians.

**The poorest districts were not only most likely to lose librarians, but most likely to gain them, too—though the losses always surpassed the gains.**

As for the other equity variables, these findings underscore the fact that the pandemic did not just perpetuate existing inequity in librarian access; but, in fact, made it worse. Within each spending category, the combination of losses and gains exacerbated the pre-pandemic problem.

Chart 6.



<sup>3</sup> Per pupil expenditures data used in this analysis are for 2018-19, the latest such data available.

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### Majority Race of Students

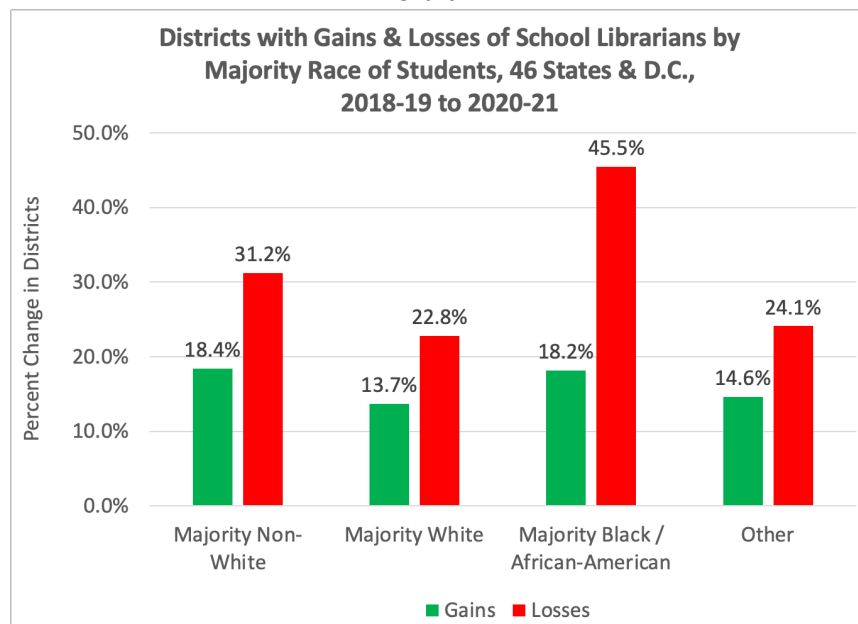
The SLIDE project's *Perspectives* report documented the fact that districts serving majorities of non-white students were less likely to have full-time librarians in schools and more likely to have no librarians at all by 2018-19 (Lance & Kachel, p. 48). Unsurprisingly, as the pandemic began, majority non-white districts were more likely than majority white ones to report librarian losses.

**Most notably, pandemic-related librarian losses in majority Black/African-American districts were almost twice as likely as in other districts.**

Unexpectedly, both majority non-white and majority Black/African American districts were also slightly more likely to experience gains in school librarians. And, as for enrollment and locale, this combination of losses and gains for these districts meant that inequities in librarian access that existed before the pandemic became even worse after it began. Among majority non-white and majority Black/African-American districts, the combination of losses and gains meant both net losses as well as increased inequity even within these groups of districts.

When majority Hispanic and majority non-Hispanic districts were compared, there were no significant differences in gains or losses. This finding is surprising, given that earlier SLIDE research (Lance & Kachel, 2021, p. 61) indicated that, for 2018-19, majority Hispanic districts were twice as likely as majority non-Hispanic districts to have no librarians.

Chart 7.



## The COVID-19 Pandemic & Inequities in Access to School Librarians

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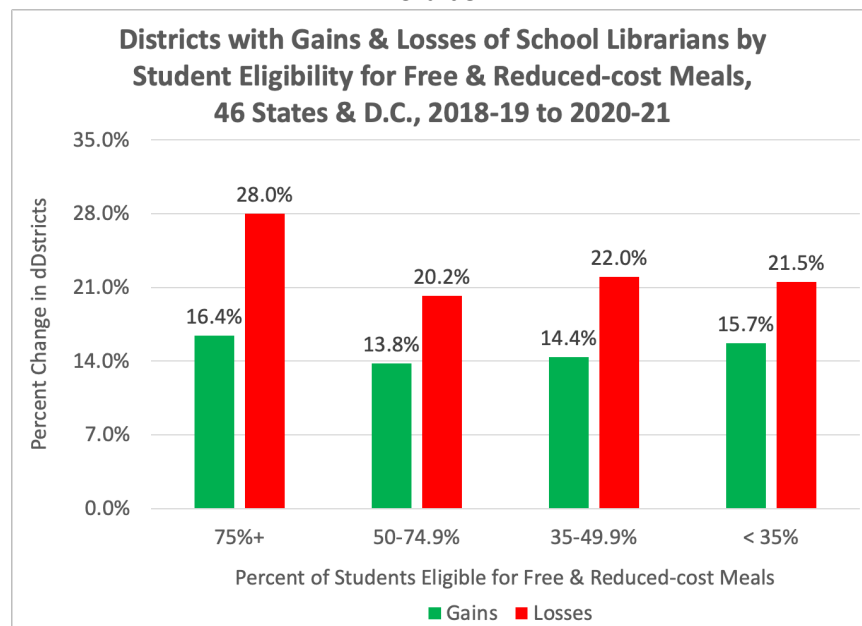
### Free & Reduced-cost Meals Eligibility

School funding, as indicated by per pupil expenditures, is one economic issue. Another is the extent to which students in a district live in poverty. This concept is measured in terms of the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-cost meals through the National School Lunch Program.

**Unsurprisingly, districts where librarian losses were most prevalent were those with the most students living in poverty (75 percent or more).**

As for other variables in this analysis, the combination of gains and losses means increasing inequality in access to school librarians both within and between poverty levels. Also, as for other variables, percentages of districts losing librarians always exceeded districts gaining them, regardless of poverty level. While there is considerably less variability in gains across poverty levels, the end result is that the net loss percentage for the poorest districts was also the largest.

Chart 8.



## The COVID-19 Pandemic & Inequities in Access to School Librarians

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#### Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented public education in the United States with many unprecedented challenges with which it was plainly unprepared to deal. More notably, however, the pandemic has shone a spotlight on many of the known and persistent educational equity issues facing public schools. It should not be surprising that these challenges have turbo-charged the pre-pandemic issues of school librarian losses and the inequities of those losses particularly to marginalized learners.

As an apparent result of the pandemic, there are now fewer school librarians than ever, and the inequities of access to school librarians for students in selected states, in city and suburban districts that have the most librarians to lose, in majority Black/African-American districts, and in poorer districts are more extreme than ever. Consider these facts drawn from the comparison of 2018-19 and 2020-21 data for districts.

- 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, 2016-17 to 2018-19. Notably, this loss is for only 46 states and D.C., excluding four states with major data quality issues sometime during those time frames, and for only about 10,000 of the nation’s approximately 13,000 local districts that reported data for the intervals of years being compared. Consequently, if data on the missing states and districts were available, it is likely that the loss of school librarians associated with the pandemic’s onset would have been about twice what it was for the previous two-year interval.
- Sixteen states each reported 50 or more fewer school librarian FTEs, and 12 states each reported 10 percent or more fewer school librarian FTEs.
- For districts in every enrollment range, the percentage of districts losing librarians exceeded the percentage gaining librarians—in some cases, on an order of two-to-one. For example, of districts with enrollments of 10,000 to 24,999, almost half lost librarians while only about a quarter gained librarians.
- City and suburban districts had higher percentages of districts both losing and gaining librarians than districts in towns and rural areas; though, for every locale type, the percentage of districts gaining librarians was consistently smaller than the percentage losing them. For example, two out of five city districts lost librarian FTEs, while only about a quarter gained FTEs. Notably, losses and gains experienced by districts in towns and rural areas were probably lower because they were more likely to have no librarians to lose, and unlikely to regain them once lost.
- Of all districts, those spending less per pupil (\$10,000 to \$11,999 and less than \$10,000), experienced greater gains and losses of librarian FTEs. Of those districts, more than a quarter lost librarians while fewer than one in five gained them. For better-funded districts (\$15,000 or more and \$12,000 to \$14,999), the percentage of districts gaining librarians better offset the percentage of districts losing them.
- Majority Black/African-American districts were almost twice as likely as other districts to lose librarians, but only modestly more likely to gain them. Almost half of majority Black/African-American districts lost librarians compared with fewer than a quarter of other districts. Conversely, one out of seven majority Black/African-American districts and one out of six other districts gained librarians.
- Districts with the most students living in poverty (i.e., 75 percent or more eligible for free and reduced-cost meals) were most likely to lose librarians, and the net loss for this group of districts was also greater than for districts with lower poverty levels.

Inequities based on factors like race and poverty were exacerbated by growing inequities within specific categories like majority Black/African-American districts and districts with the most students in poverty. Within such specific categories, some districts are gaining librarians while other districts are losing them. Unfortunately, for every factor and every category examined, the losses always exceed the gains.

Nationwide, the fact that school librarian FTEs decreased while other educator positions increased or remained relatively stable suggests that the loss of librarians is not merely 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.

What we do not know is whether or not these extraordinary and inequitable losses of school librarians are temporary. Might any of the dramatic losses reported in particular places and circumstances be reversed as public education finds a “new normal” post-COVID? It is too soon to tell. All we know is that, as usual, this latest crisis has renewed attention to—and aggravated rather than alleviated—longstanding inequities of access to school librarians, particularly for students who need their contributions to teaching and learning the most.

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These circumstances also make it important to learn the forthcoming findings of the SLIDE study's interviews of decision-makers responsible for determining staffing for library, learning resources, and educational technology services.

The data examined here are likely being impacted in unknown ways and to an unknown extent by the varying job titles of school librarians, the restructuring of positions in these staffing areas, and the reassignment of responsibilities both to and away from school librarians. And, all of those changes, already well underway, are being impacted in unknown ways by the "new normal" of post-pandemic public education.

Facing such an uncertain future, it will be critical for school library leaders to be vigilant in monitoring (and, as needed, improving) NCES's data on school librarian employment as well as other quantitative and qualitative research that sheds more light on it. Understanding the decline in school librarian employment and developing a appropriate and viable strategic response to it depends on sustained and timely analysis of complete and accurate information about what is happening, where, and why.

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### Appendix 2020-21 Data Quality Issues

For the latest data year, 2020-21, three kinds of data quality issues compromised knowledge of the status of school librarians in some states:

- dubious data (specifically, different data from different sources in the same agencies),
- states that did not report about librarians for any districts in their states, and
- states that previously reported some districts as having zero librarians for multiple years, but now, for this latest year, are missing data about librarians for those same districts.

Responsibility for these data quality issues must be shared by local districts, state education departments, and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). While some issues are plainly statewide ones, others result from districts not reporting required data and neither state nor federal agencies pursuing the missing data successfully.

#### States with Dubious Data

Two of the largest states in the nation—California and New York—have been reporting highly dubious data about school librarians for several years.

California’s data quality issues began in 2015-16, when districts were encouraged to report “teacher librarians” as teachers rather than librarians. As a result, the state’s total number of school librarians in full-time equivalents (FTEs) dropped by more than 700 FTEs from 2014-15 to 2015-16. This under-reporting of school librarian FTEs continued through 2019-20, when California reported to NCES fewer than 90 school librarians for the entire state. For 2020-21, the state reported over 600 school librarian FTEs—a decidedly more believable and consistent figure, resulting from a concerted effort of key state education and library leaders to correct earlier reporting errors.

New York’s data quality issues span the three most recent data years: 2018-19, 2019-20, and 2020-21. To NCES, the state education department reported figures indicating a loss of more than 2,000 librarian FTEs from 2018-19 to 2019-20, and an almost doubling of librarian FTEs from 2019-20 to 2020-21 (from more than 500 to almost 1,000). While reported to and accepted by NCES, those figures are not regarded as credible, or consistent with other state data sources, by knowledgeable experts who wish to remain anonymous.

While the longstanding California issues appear to have been resolved, the “disconnect” between what New York reports to NCES and what its own data system reports continues for now. Substantial efforts were made by the California Department of Education to address their data problems. A similar effort is needed by the New York State Education Department.

#### Whole States of Missing Data

For the latest data year, 2020-21, data on school librarian FTEs are missing at both state and district levels for Illinois and Utah.

Illinois’ main data quality issue until most recently has been missing data. From 2015-16 to 2018-19, almost half of the state’s local school districts did not report about librarian FTEs to NCES (Lance & Kachel, 2021). During each of those years, few, if any, districts reported having no librarians; so, it seems likely that most of the non-reporting districts should have reported zero rather than not report at all. This issue has been brought to the attention of school library leaders in Illinois, and a project is underway to ensure that school librarian FTEs are reported more accurately in the future.

Until 2020-21, Utah reported school librarian FTEs consistently; but, for that latest year, the entire state—like Illinois—was not reported at both state and district levels. An inquiry of the Utah State Board of Education yielded a state total for school librarian FTEs. Given the state’s reporting history, it seems likely that the absence of 2020-21 data can be attributed to the pandemic.

#### States in Denial?

For the 2020-21 school year, five states—Connecticut, Kansas, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and West Virginia—seem to be “in denial” about the absence of school librarians in many districts. Substantial numbers of districts in all five states left the librarian FTE question blank, yet no districts in those states responded with zero librarians. In

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other words, they refused to answer the question. What we can infer is that the districts did not want to potentially reveal that they no longer had any librarians.

**Table 4. States Reporting No Local Districts With Zero Librarians  
But Substantial Percentages of Non-Reporting Districts, 2020-21**

| State         | Districts reporting any librarians | Districts reporting zero librarians | Districts not reporting |
|---------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Connecticut   | 147 (87.0%)                        | 0 (0.0%)                            | 22 (13.0%)              |
| Kansas        | 148 (51.7%)                        | 0 (0.0%)                            | 138 (48.3%)             |
| Massachusetts | 238 (73.9%)                        | 0 (0.0%)                            | 84 (26.1%)              |
| New Jersey    | 417 (76.8%)                        | 0 (0.0%)                            | 126 (23.2%)             |
| West Virginia | 30 (54.5%)                         | 0 (0.0%)                            | 25 (45.5%)              |

The credibility of these data must be questioned, particularly given the fact that, as recently as early 2021, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and West Virginia did not mandate school librarians and Kansas and New Jersey had mandates that were no longer being enforced (Kachel & Lance, 2021). Given those conditions as well as the state of affairs nationwide, it is extremely unlikely that there were no districts with zero librarians in these five states. The remoteness of this possibility seems even more certain when one considers the reporting history of these states between 2015-16 and 2018-19.

**Table 5. Number of Local Districts Reporting Zero Librarians for  
Selected States, 2015-16 to 2018-19**

| State         | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2018-19 |
|---------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Connecticut   | 12      | 17      | 18      | 19      |
| Kansas        | 100     | 110     | 104     | 110     |
| Massachusetts | 57      | 58      | 58      | 64      |
| New Jersey    | 0       | 0       | 0       | 112*    |
| West Virginia | 11      | 11      | 21      | 0       |

\* 2018-19 data from New Jersey School Performance Report Cards via New Jersey Association of School Librarians

What appears more likely in these states is that all or most of the districts for which school librarian FTEs were not reported for 2020-21 were, in fact, districts with zero librarians. Given these patterns, one has to wonder how many states and districts are choosing to not report about school librarians (i.e., missing data) rather than acknowledge that the known number is zero.

Collectively, the non-reporting districts in these five states total 395—or 95.9 percent of the 412 non-reporting districts for the 47 states and D.C. for which usable data were available for 2020-21. (While most of the data analyzed in this report are for 2018-19 and 2020-21, this assessment of 2020-21 data includes California, which had addressed its data quality issues by then.) Addressing this issue in those five states would go a long way toward eliminating missing data about school librarians nationwide.

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**Watch for SLIDE's final report  
Voices of Decision-Makers About School Librarian Employment  
in 2023**

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