

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

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A recent article published in the Peabody Journal of Education highlights the latest research outcomes from the three-year IMLS grant project led by Dr. Keith Curry Lance and Debra Kachel. The Peabody article reveals patterns of inequitable access to librarians in K-12 public schools across the United States. This phase of the SLIDE project analyzed quantitative data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the Common Core of Data (CCD) on trends in employment of school librarians related to race, ethnicity, and district characteristics including size, locale, and poverty levels.

Findings revealed that students in majority Hispanic and nonwhite school districts were less likely to have access to a school librarian. The disparities are exacerbated by high poverty rates, rurality, and lower student enrollment. These trends point to an educational equity issue in which access to a school librarian is a privilege more often denied to traditionally underserved groups. Key findings by category are described below.

## Racial and ethnic disparities:

- Majority Hispanic districts were almost twice as likely to be without a librarian than majority non-Hispanic

- Though the inequities were less extreme, majority non-white districts were more likely to be without a librarian than majority white districts.

## Poverty, racial and ethnic disparities:

- For highest poverty districts, majority non-white districts are more likely to be without any librarians than majority white ones.
- Inequities persist between majority Hispanic and non-Hispanic districts regardless of a district's poverty status.

## Locale, racial and ethnic disparities:

- Rural majority non-white districts were more likely to be without any librarians than non-white districts in cities, suburbs, or towns.
- Districts least likely to have librarians are in rural areas serving majority Hispanic students.

## Enrollment, racial and ethnic disparities:

- Enrollment size did not account for librarian staffing differences between majority Hispanic and non-Hispanic districts.

- Inequities tended to persist or worsen as district enrollment decreased.

The final phase of the SLIDE project is currently underway. The project team is analyzing the qualitative data resulting from interviews with over 50 school administrators and board members to better understand the decisions that were made surrounding school library staffing. Interview participants come from districts that either gained or lost school library positions since 2015. The forthcoming report will be the first of its kind to explore decision-making around the reported near 20% loss of school library positions.

The SLIDE website has interactive tools to empower users to customize searches, compare data, and use evidence to advocate for more equitable school library staffing decisions. The project website is [libslide.org](https://libslide.org) and you can read the open access Peabody Journal article here: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2023.2160112>.

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