

Voices of Decision-Makers

How District & School Leaders Decide About School Librarian Employment

Appendix F. The COVID-19 Pandemic & Inequities in Access to School Librarians: A SLIDE Special Report

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As part of the federally-funded grant project "SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation--Decline or Evolution?" this study analyzed the status of school librarian employment for almost 13,000 U.S public school districts from 2018-19 and 2020-21. The purpose of the study was to learn how the COVID-19 pandemic, which radically disrupted K-12 education, impacted the losses or gains of school librarian positions.

The dataset utilized was the Common Core of Data annually collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) which consists of self-reported data from school districts. The report is based on data for public school districts in 46 states and the District of Columbia as data for California, Illinois, New York, and Utah were either unavailable or unusable for this analysis. Full-time equivalents (FTEs) of school librarian positions were compared to percentages and net numbers of district administrators, school administrators, teachers, and instructional coordinators. Additionally, other characteristics were studied--enrollment size, locale (city, suburb, town, rural), per pupil expenditures, majority race of students, and poverty based on the federal Free and Reduced-cost Meals Program--in relation to the losses or gains of school librarians.

The results showed that 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. For districts in every enrollment range and every locale type, the percentage losing librarians exceeded the percentage gaining librarians. Inequities in access to school librarians most notably increased in lower-enrollment districts, those in rural areas, those serving more minority students, particularly Black students, and districts with more students living in poverty. Nationwide, school librarian FTEs decreased while other educator positions increased or remained relatively stable, suggesting that the loss of librarians may not merely be 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. It is unknown whether these inequitable losses of school librarians are temporary or will become a post-COVID "new normal."

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<https://libSLIDE.org/publications/pandemic>.