Thematic Analysis of Interviews

The analysis summarizes the responses to each interview question and cross-tabulates the answers to questions and combinations of questions that shed new light on the decision-making processes of school leaders impacting librarian and related employment.

Interviewees

Of the 49 usable interviews of school leaders, 23 interviewees made decisions to add or restore school librarians, 21 made decisions to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify librarians, and 5 made both types of decisions. To put the 49 interviews in context, however, the first step in the analysis was to summarize who the interviewees were by geography and position and to examine how their districts compared to all other local school districts based on geography and key district characteristics.

Geography

Districts represented by SLIDE interviewees were compared to all other local school districts using 2021-2022 national data from the Common Core of Data (CCD) of NCES. (See Map 1.) Interview districts include local school districts from 29 states and the District of Columbia. Notably, 26 states mandate some level of school librarians, so were less likely to have districts that would be selected for interviews, because their staffing levels were more stable (Kachel & Lance, 2021, p. 4). Of the states with participating interviewees, four states were represented that had enforced staffing mandates (D.C., Montana, Nebraska, and North Dakota); eight states were represented that do not enforce their mandates (Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington).

Interview states include eight Northeastern states: Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts (3 interviews), Maine, New Jersey (2), New York (2), Pennsylvania (3), and Vermont. (Unless otherwise noted, there was a single interview from each state.) The South was represented by four states—Maryland, Tennessee, Texas (3), and Virginia—as well as the District of Columbia. Interviewees came from eight Midwestern states: Indiana, Kansas (5), Michigan, Minnesota (2), Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Ohio. Nine interview states were in the West: California, Colorado (4), Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon (3), Utah, Washington (2), and Wyoming. Thus, there were nine interview states in the West, eight each in the Northeast and Midwest, and four in the South plus D.C. Again, the absence of more interviews in the South is almost certainly due to the greater likelihood that states in that region mandated school librarians. Doubtless, this broad geographic representation could not have been achieved without the active support of the state intermediaries, the project partners, Advisory Council members, and others.

Map 1.

SLIDE Interviewees by State
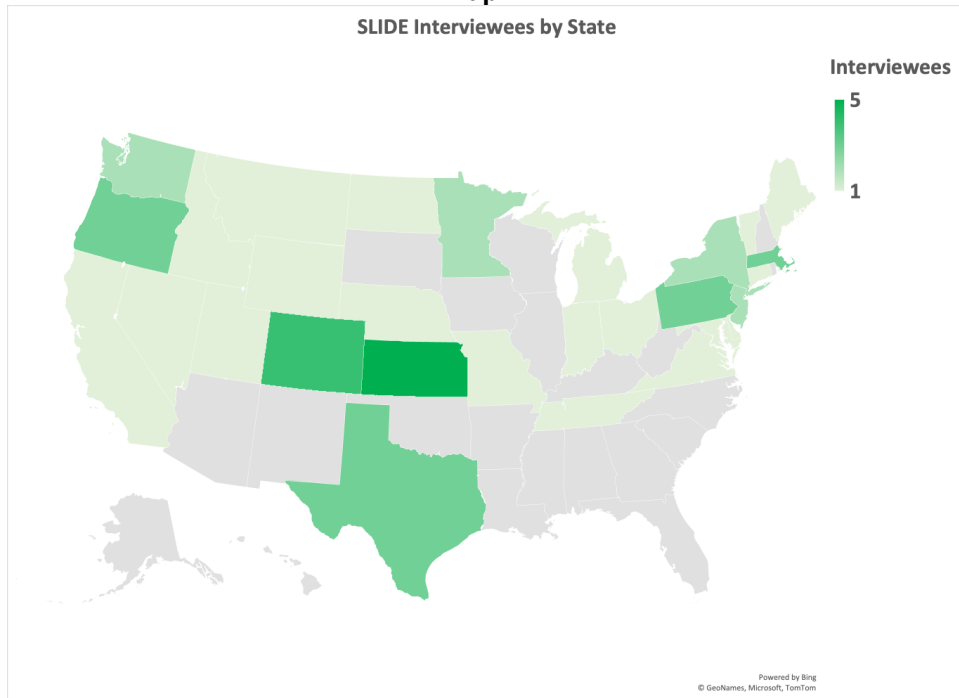
Table 3. Number of Interviewees by State

State	Interviewees	State	Interviewees
CA	1	ND	1
CO	4	NE	1
CT	1	NJ	2
DC	1	NV	1
DE	1	NY	2
ID	1	OH	1
IN	1	OR	3
KS	5	PA	3
MA	3	TN	1
MD	1	TX	3
ME	1	UT	1
MI	1	VA	1
MN	2	VT	1
MO	1	WA	2
MT	1	WY	1

Position Type

Of the 49 interviewees, the vast majority, 42, were district level officials—19 were district superintendents or assistant superintendents; nine were directors of libraries or instructional media; five were directors of curriculum, instruction, or literacy; five were directors of educational technology; two were school board members or trustees; one was a chief information officer; and one was a human-resources official. Only seven were school principals. (See Chart 1.)

Chart 1.
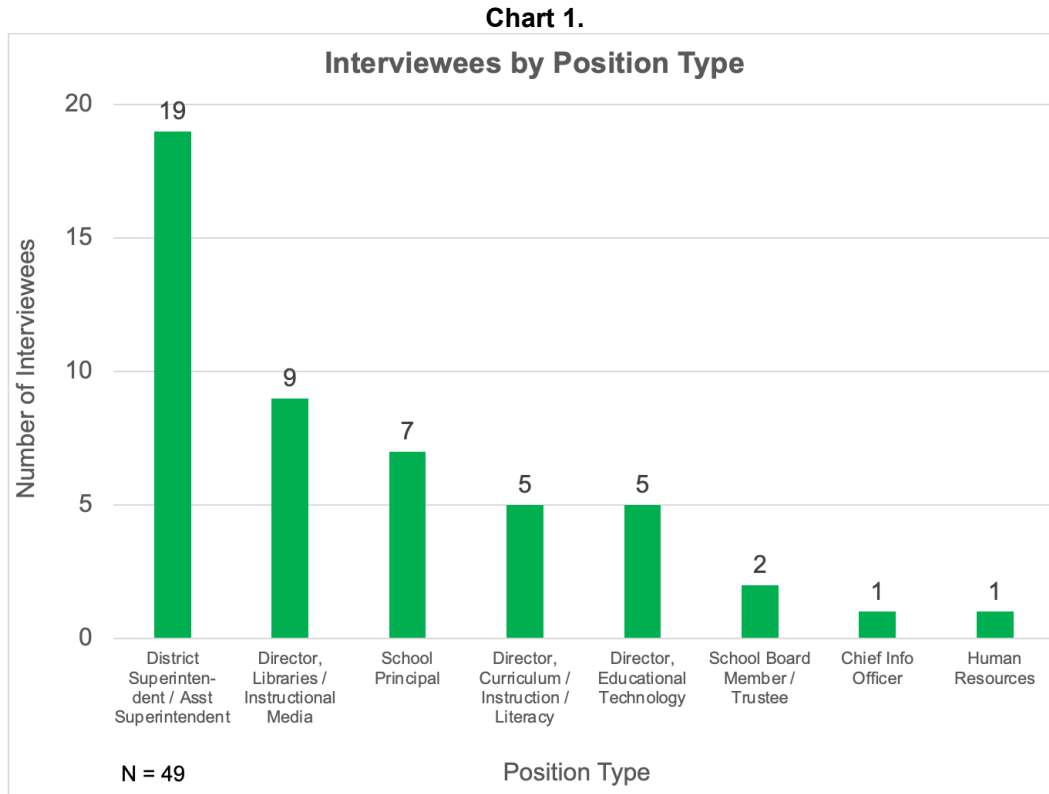
To assess the representativeness of the interview districts, they were compared statistically with all other districts on key district characteristics and student demographics:

- Student enrollment (ranging from 25,000 or more to less than 300),
- District locale (i.e., city, suburb, town, and rural),
- Per pupil expenditures (ranging from $15,000 or more to less than $10,000),
- Percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals (ranging from 75% or more—indicating districts with the most poverty—to less than 35%—indicating districts with the least poverty),
- Majority race (majority non-white vs. majority white), and
- Majority ethnicity (majority Hispanic vs. majority non-Hispanic).

Tables 1-6 present comparative data for each of these variables.

Student Enrollment

School leaders interviewed for SLIDE overrepresent districts with higher student enrollment with 73.9 percent of interview districts having enrollments of more than 2,500 compared to 28.0 percent nationally. (See Table 4.) The greatest percentage difference is for the more than 25,000 category, which includes 30.4 percent of interview districts compared with only 2.0 percent of all local districts. This gap is found in the districts with student enrollment less than 2,499 where school leaders interviewed under-represent districts at 26.1 percent in comparison to 72.0 percent of national districts.

Table 4. Distribution of Interview Districts and All Other Districts by Student Enrollment, 2021-22

Group of Districts	Student Enrollment							
	25,000 or More	10,000-24,999	5,000-9,999	2,500-4,999	1,000-2,499	600-999	300-599	Less Than 300
Interview Districts (n=46)	30.4% (14)	10.9% (5)	10.9% (5)	21.7% (10)	15.2% (7)	6.5% (3)	2.2% (1)	2.2% (1)
All Other Districts (N=13,273)	2.0% (269)	4.6% (607)	7.5% (996)	13.9% (1,849)	23.8% (3,161)	13.7% (1,821)	14.4% (1,905)	20.1% (2,665)

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021-22 School Year
Note: There were only 46 interview districts because there were multiple interviewees from a few districts.

Locale

School leaders interviewed for SLIDE partially reflect the national breakdown of local districts by locale. 4 (See Table 5.) The percentage of interview districts in City locales is 43.5 percent in comparison to 6.0 percent nationally. The largest gap is found in the Rural location category with 15.2 percent representation of school leaders interviewed for SLIDE in comparison to 53.2 percent nationally. Interviewed leaders in both Suburb and Town locales align with the representation nationally. This data aligns with the findings for enrollment: districts with higher enrollments are over-represented, while districts with lower enrollments are under-represented. Rural districts tend to have lower enrollments, and City districts, higher enrollments.

Table 5. Distribution of Interview Districts and All Other Districts by Locale

Group of Districts	School District Locale			
	City	**Suburb**	**Town**	**Rural**
Interview Districts (n=46)	43.5% (20)	21.7% (10)	19.6% (9)	15.2% (7)
All Other Districts (N=13,343)	6.0% (807)	23.0% (3,064)	17.8% (2,378)	53.2% (7,094)

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021-22 School Year

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4 The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) categorizes 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, n.d.)

Per Pupil Expenditures

School leaders interviewed for SLIDE generally reflect the national breakdown of local districts by per pupil expenditures (includes salaries, employee benefits, purchased services, supplies, and tuition). (See Table 6.) Interview districts are slightly overrepresented in the top two categories and underrepresented in the bottom two categories. 84.5 percent of leaders interviewed are in the two top categories, in which states spend more than $12,000 per pupil, versus 75.9 percent nationally. School districts in the bottom two categories, in which states spend less than $11,999 per pupil, are less represented in SLIDE at 15.5 percent versus 24.1 percent nationally. This suggests that the interview districts somewhat over-represent districts with higher per pupil expenditure levels compared to other districts nationwide.

Table 6. Distribution of Interview Districts and All Other Districts by Per Pupil Expenditures, 2019-20

Group of Districts	Per Pupil Expenditures			
	$15,000 or More	**$12,000-14,999**	**$10,000-11,999**	**Less Than $10,000**
Interview Districts (n=45)	55.6% (25)	28.9% (13)	13.3% (6)	2.2% (1)
All Other Districts (N=13,044)	49.1% (6,402)	26.8% (3,496)	18.1% (2,365)	6.0% (781)

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2019-20 School Year.
Note: Per pupil expenditures data are for 2019-20, 2 years behind other data, because they are released separately after auditing. There are only 45 interview districts for per pupil expenditures due to one district not reporting.

Eligibility for Free/Reduced-Price Meals (Poverty)

School leaders interviewed for SLIDE partially reflect the national breakdown of local districts on the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals (FARM). (See Table 7.) Districts with higher percentages of FARM-eligible students are ones with higher levels of community poverty. The percentage of interview districts with 75 percent or more and 35 to 49.9 percent of students eligible for FARM closely align with the national data. The greatest percentage difference is for the less than 35 percent category—districts with the least poverty—which includes 61.8 percent of interview districts compared with only 40.6 percent of all local districts. This is followed by a smaller percentage gap for the 50 to 74.9 percent group, which includes only 5.9 percent of interview districts, but 21.0 percent of all local districts. Notably, however, the proportional gap for this group—interview districts represent less than a third of all districts in this category—is larger than for the less than 35 percent category. This suggests that the interview districts under-represent districts with 50 to 74.9 percent of students eligible for FARM more than they over-represent districts with less than 35 percent of students eligible for FARM, when compared with other districts nationwide.

Table 7. Distribution of Interview Districts and All Other Districts on Percent of Students Eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meals (Poverty Indicator), 2021-22

Group of Districts	Percent of Students Eligible for Free/Reduced-Price Meals			
	75% or More	**50-74.9%**	**35-49.9%**	**Less Than 35%**
Interview Districts (n=34)	11.8% (4)	5.9% (2)	20.6% (7)	61.8% (21)
All Other Districts (N=9,663)	11.3% (1,093)	21.0% (2,034)	27.1% (2,614)	40.6% (3,922)

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021-22 School Year.
Note: FARM data were only available for 34 of the 46 interview districts. These data had to be aggregated from school to district level, and incomplete reporting by some schools made it impossible to calculate a district figure.

Race & Ethnicity

In terms of both majority race and majority ethnicity, interview districts are remarkably representative of all other local districts. In the case of majority race, majority non-white districts are approximately a quarter of all districts. In the case of majority ethnicity, majority Hispanic districts are about four percent of interview districts, and about nine percent of all other local districts. Because of the relatively small proportions of majority Hispanic districts, however, this percentage difference is not statistically significant. (See Tables 8 and 9.)

Table 8. Distribution of Interview Districts and All Other Districts on Majority Race (white vs. non-white), 2021-22

Group of Districts	Majority Race	
	Majority non-white	**Majority white**
Interview Districts (n=46)	12 (26.1%)	34 (73.9%)
All Other Districts (N=13,021)	3,136 (24.1%)	9,885 (75.9%)

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021-22 School Year

Table 9. Distribution of Interview Districts and All Other Districts on Majority Ethnicity (Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic), 2021-22

Group of Districts	Majority Ethnicity	
	Majority Hispanic	**Majority non-Hispanic**
Interview Districts (n=46)	2 (4.3%)	44 (95.7%)
All Other Districts (N=12,981)	1,208 (9.3%)	11,773 (90.7%)

Source: Common Core of Data (CCD), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2021-22 School Year

This comparative profile of interview districts and all other districts demonstrates that districts interviewed for SLIDE, although geographically representative, more often include school leaders from districts in cities as well as those with lower poverty levels and larger enrollments. However, interview districts are somewhat representative of all districts in terms of per pupil expenditures, and highly representative of them in terms of majority race and ethnicity.