Co-occurrence of Decision Factors

Whether interviewees decided to add or restore school librarians or to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify them, the factors they identified as drivers of those decisions—and the concurrence of those factors with each other—shed new light on their decision-making processes. The complexity of these decisions is evident in the fact that 49 interviewees identified a total of 174 factors that influenced their decision-making.

Factors in Decisions to Add or Restore School Librarians

Of the many factors to which interviewees attributed decisions to <u>add or restore</u> school librarians, those most frequently mentioned included: making a change in priorities; stand-alone instruction by school librarians; equity of student access to staff; experiencing a change in administration; the closely inter-related factors of stand-alone instruction by librarians, planning time for teachers, and collaboration between librarians and teachers; and standards-based testing. For each of these factors, concurrent ones indicate more about the interviewee's thinking. (See Table 16.)

Change in Priorities

Not surprisingly, making a change in priorities, the broadest and most frequently-cited factor—mentioned by 13 of the 28 interviewees who added or restored librarians—concurred with:

- 2 structural factors:
    - new funding (mentioned by 6 interviewees) and
    - state government mandates (3).
- The lone pragmatic factor: providing planning time for teachers (4), and
- 4 other strategic factors:
    - equity of access to staff (7),
    - stand-alone instruction by a librarian (5),
    - a change of administration (4), and
    - collaboration between librarians and teachers (3).

These patterns suggest that several interviewees who decided to add or restore librarians prioritized more equitable student access to a librarian, availability of new funding, the instructional role of a librarian—independently, in collaboration with teachers, or both—or some combination of those three factors. Other interviewees were motivated to prioritize adding or restoring librarians by a change of administration, the existence of a state government mandate, or their intent to facilitate collaboration between librarians and teachers.

Stand-Alone Instruction by School Librarians

Of the 11 interviewees who attributed their decisions to add or restore librarians to the stand-alone instruction provided by librarians, six also cited concerns about equity of student access to staff, and five each also cited

changing priorities, providing for planning time for teachers, and facilitating collaboration between librarians and teachers. Another concurrent factor for four of these 11 interviewees was new funding.

The concurrence of these factors suggests that interviewees who decided to add or restore librarians prioritized having more of them because of their understanding of the contributions librarians can make. Those contributions include collaborating with teachers on the design and delivery of instruction and ensuring that all students in their districts benefit equally from the presence of a librarian. And, in some cases, the availability of one or more new funding sources made possible the addition of more librarians for these and other reasons.

Equity of Student Access to Library Staff

Ten interviewees credited their decisions to add or restore librarians to a concern about ensuring equity of student access to staff. Concurrent factors with this equity factor included: making a change in priorities (mentioned by 7 interviewees), facilitating stand-alone instruction by school librarians (6), and availability of new funding sources (3). That these decision-making factors coincided suggests that a substantial block of interviewees who added or restored librarians believe that the presence of a librarian is an educational equity issue, at least in part because of the instruction librarians provide on their own. Not surprisingly, such decisions to add or restore librarians were made easier in some cases by the availability of new funding.

Availability of New Funding

Of the eight interviewees who cited availability of new funding as a structural factor in their decisions to add or restore librarians, three of them also cited state government mandates as another structural factor. In these cases, the availability of new sources of funding may have enabled a district to add librarian positions in order to comply with a state government mandate. New funding may have ranked higher due to an influx of federal pandemic relief funds known as the American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ARP ESSER) that became available during the time period of this study. (Funds must be spent by September 2024.) The ESSER legislation allocated approximately $190 billion in aid to states and school districts ("Frequently Asked Questions," 2021).

Table 16. Co-occurrence of Factors in Decisions to Add or Restore Librarians

Factors	Structural				Prag-matic	Strategic								
	New funding	Opened new building/ enrollment increase	State government mandate	Grant/funding requirements	Planning time for teachers	Change in priorities	Stand-alone instruction	Equity of student access to staff	Change in administration	Collaborating with teachers	Standards-based testing	Addressing special student needs	Social/emotional learning	Strategic plan
Structural														
New funding	**8**													
Opened new building / enrollment increase	2	**7**												
State government mandate	3	1	**4**											
Grant/funding requirements	1	1	1	**2**										
Pragmatic														
Planning time for teachers	3	1	1	1	**7**									
Strategic														
Change in priorities	6	1	3	2	4	**13**								
Stand-alone instruction	4	2	0	0	5	5	**11**							
Equity of student access to staff	3	1	1	0	2	7	6	**10**						
Change in administration	2	2	2	1	0	4	0	2	**9**					
Collaborating with teachers	2	3	1	2	3	3	5	2	1	**7**				
Standards-based testing	1	1	0	0	2	1	2	1	2	1	**4**			
Addressing special student needs	1	2	0	0	2	1	2	1	0	1	2	**3**		
Social / emotional learning	2	0	1	0	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	**2**	
Strategic plan	1	0	0	0	2	1	2	2	0	2	0	0	1	**2**

Notes: Each bold number in the gray-shaded diagonal is the number of decisions in which that issue was a factor. Read to the left and down from that number to find all concurring factors. Lightest shades indicate co-occurrences of 0 to 2. Medium shades indicate co-occurrences of 3 to 4. And darkest shades indicate co-occurrences of 5 or greater. N = 28 decisions

Planning Time for Teachers, Librarian-Teacher Collaboration & Stand-Alone Instruction by Librarians

Seven interviewees attributed their decisions to add or restore librarians to providing for planning time for teachers. Seven also attributed their decisions to facilitating collaboration between librarians and teachers. Five mentioned prioritizing stand-alone instruction by librarians. For both teacher planning time and librarian-teacher collaboration, another coinciding factor for four interviewees was making a change in priorities. Another concurrent factor for providing planning time for teachers was gaining access to new funding (3 interviewees). And, for librarian-teacher collaboration, another concurrent factor was opening a new building or experiencing an enrollment increase (also 3

interviewees.) Taken together, these inter-related factors suggest that the school leaders interviewed about adding or restoring librarians understood that librarians can play an instructional role, both in collaboration with classroom teachers and independently. In the latter case, leaders valued stand-alone instruction by librarians, whether delivered in the context of planning time for teachers or otherwise. Pointedly, most leaders perceived librarians teaching students in the library while teachers had planning time as a win-win schedule. None expressed or implied a perception of the librarian's role as "babysitting." Notably, though, their support for both this kind of scheduling and collaboration between librarians and teachers—which calls for teachers and librarians to plan together—is contradictory. The opportunity to add or restore librarians for these interviewees was variously associated with changed administrative priorities, availability of new funding, and opening of new schools or increases in enrollment—all factors that may make it easier for decision-makers to staff libraries to contribute to instruction.

Opened New Building / Increased Enrollment

Of the seven interviewees who explained their decisions to add or restore librarians to having opened a new school building or experienced an enrollment increase, three also cited the need for collaboration between librarians and teachers, while two also mentioned valuing the stand-alone instruction provided by librarians and their contribution to addressing special student needs. This factor was also associated with a change in administration, a likely coinciding event when a new school opens. When a school is opened or experiences an influx of new students— particularly when that coincides with the arrival of a new administrator—it is an opportunity for school leaders to prioritize librarians.

State Government Mandates

Of the four interviewees who attributed their decisions to add or restore librarians to state government mandates, three each also associated the decision with a change in priorities and the availability of new funding, and two also identified a change in administration as a contributing factor. When a new administrator arrives, it is probably not unusual for a district or school to review its compliance with state mandates. And, when that is done and it is found that a mandate is not being met, the availability of extra funds provides an opportunity to prioritize a staffing increase to meet the mandate.

Standards-Based Testing

Of interviewees who added or restored school librarians, only four indicated that their decisions were influenced by concern about standards-based testing. Interestingly, though these numbers are obviously small, two each also mentioned providing planning time for teachers, stand-alone instruction by librarians, addressed special student needs, and a change of administration. Notably, only one of these interviewees mentioned facilitating collaboration between librarians and teachers. This pattern of concurring factors suggests that school leaders—especially new ones—who are concerned about test scores may value stand-alone instruction by librarians. Such instruction

simultaneously helps to free up planning time for teachers and gives librarians an opportunity to focus needed attention on students facing special challenges.

Factors in Decisions to Reduce, Eliminate, Combine or Reclassify School Librarians

Interviewees attributed their decisions to <u>reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify</u> school librarians to many factors. The most frequent structural factors were budget constraints, closing a building or experiencing enrollment decrease, and facing pipeline issues finding qualified candidates for librarian vacancies. The most frequent pragmatic factors were needing more teachers and needing the incumbent in another position. The most frequent strategic factors were change in priorities, choosing to hire other specialists or coaches, believing the position of librarian to be obsolete, and change in administration. For each of these factors, concurrent ones indicate more about the interviewee's thinking. (See Table 17.)

Budget Constraints

Whenever a school librarian position—or, indeed, any position—is under threat, the most predictable explanation usually offered is that it is a matter of budget constraints. As indicated by the other decision factors coinciding with that one, however, a district or school budget documents the priorities and perceptions of decision-makers. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the other factor coinciding most frequently with budget constraints was change in priorities. Eleven (11) of the 17 interviewees who attributed librarian cuts to budget constraints also cited priority changes. The next three most frequent factors coinciding with budget constraints were: hired other specialists or coaches (6), needed staff in another position (5, and 4 of those specifying the need for more teachers), and deemed the position of librarian obsolete (5). In fewer cases, attributing librarian cuts to budget constraints coincided with change in administration and "pipeline" issues finding qualified candidates for librarian vacancies (3 each).

Change in Priorities

Of the 12 interviewees who associated librarian cuts with a change in priorities, 11 also mentioned budget constraints, underscoring the earlier point about the most frequent factors coinciding with budget constraints. The kinds of priority changes most frequently mentioned were: hired other specialists or coaches (5), needed the incumbent in another position (4, of which 2 specified classroom teacher), and change in administration and position of librarian deemed obsolete (3 each).

Thus, when interviewees indicated that a change in priorities motivated their librarian cuts, the greater priorities—to the extent they were identified—tended to be preferences for hiring other specialists or coaches and other district or school positions (often classroom teachers). Notably, of interviewees whose change in priorities was hiring other types of educators, many believed librarians were obsolete. Librarian cuts attributed to priority changes also sometimes coincided with changes of district or school leadership—though, priority changes were more often not associated with such senior personnel changes.