

**Voices of Decision-Makers**  
*How District & School Leaders Decide About School Librarian Employment*

**Tradeoffs / Advantages & Disadvantages of Decisions**

When district or school leaders make decisions to add or restore librarians or to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify them, those decisions are not made in isolation. The implications for other staffing decisions and for other consequences for the district, schools, and students have to be taken into account. Sometimes, new funding or other fortuitous turns of events make it possible to add library staff without sacrificing staff elsewhere. In such times, the impetus for the decision may be the perceived advantage to be gained. Other times, in more challenging circumstances, there is no good or right decision, because the leader knows that whatever decision they make, it is likely to do harm. The best they can do is try to minimize the damage. Sometimes, it is not a matter of choosing one position over another; but, of having to make a cut without any compensatory gain.

*Win-Lose Tradeoffs*

One type of scenario interviewees described was a win-lose tradeoff, gaining librarians while cutting elsewhere to pay for them. Some interviewees described staff-for-staff tradeoffs in which librarians were chosen over other types of staff, such as classroom teachers and counselors. Other interviewees reported adding a librarian rather than a teacher, even when it meant larger class sizes, or adding a librarian to ensure that teachers had planning time. Notably, the latter was such an absolute commitment that the interviewer noted that cuts had to be made elsewhere. (See Table 30.)

**Table 30. Win-Lose Tradeoffs of Adding or Restoring Librarians**

Tradeoff	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Added staff / Lost staff: Recruiting best teachers to become librarians	We will pull the best teachers, train them and send them to school to get their library credential. The challenge: making sure we don't take too much from the classroom environment, given teacher shortages.
Added staff / Lost staff: Gaining librarians meant losing counselors	The tradeoff was not getting elementary school counselors. I was able to get secondary school counselors, but I would have liked to have them at every level—pre-school, all the way up through grade 12. We just couldn't afford the elementary counselors, because I wasn't willing to give up the librarians.
Added staff / Lost staff Added staff / Lost elsewhere: Larger class sizes	For many of our principals, taking on another certified person—a librarian—meant giving up a certified person somewhere else. So, the tradeoff was having larger class sizes in one grade to add another media specialist. There was no extra money to have both.
Added staff / Lost elsewhere: priority to give teachers planning time	We add librarians when necessary because they enable us to provide planning time for our classroom teachers. Reducing the number of librarians is not an option. Cuts have to be made elsewhere.

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*Win-Win Advantages*

Some interviewees reported that their decisions to add or restore librarians were win-win scenarios, in which the decision was made due to the anticipated benefits of the new positions rather than their preference over kinds of other staff. In some cases, circumstances permitted adding librarians without making staff cuts elsewhere. In other cases, adding librarians was chosen for the anticipated advantages of increased collaboration between librarians and teachers, more stand-alone instruction by librarians, more support for teachers from librarians, and improved utility of library space. (See Table 31.)

**Table 31. Win-Win Advantages of Adding or Restoring Librarians**

Advantage	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Added librarian / No other staff loss	The success of adding staff did not come at the expense of other positions in the district. We were able to add staff thanks to a highly collaborative Director of Technology and Library Media Director working together. They negotiated something that would work for both of them.
Added librarian / Gained more collaboration between librarian and teachers	Teachers who want a co-teaching partner no longer have to worry about whether or not the librarian will be in their building on a particular day. Professional teacher librarians set a different tone than the paraprofessionals principals used to cover lunch duty or other assignments.
Added librarian / Gained more stand-alone instruction by librarians	Adding a librarian gave teachers one more planning period a week.
Added librarian / Gained more teacher support by librarians	Our principals don't ask to exchange their librarian for another classroom teacher. Those conversations are non-existent. They understand that their librarian supports teachers in ways that have positive impacts on student achievement.
Added librarian / Increased utility of library space	A new librarian became the person to put into practice our makerspace / technology / hands-on learning space. This supported what students were learning in the classroom and vice-versa.

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*Lose-Win Trade-Offs*

A common lose-win scenario when school librarian positions are lost is when district or school leaders choose to sacrifice a librarian position for another, most often a classroom teacher position. In other cases, a librarian position—and, indeed, the library itself—may be sacrificed in order to use library space differently. (See Table 32.)

**Table 32. Lose-Win Tradeoffs of Reducing, Eliminating, Combining or Reclassifying Librarians**

Tradeoff	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Lost librarian / Gained teacher	It's hard to keep an adult in the library when a group of children doesn't have a second-grade teacher. When you're not directly responsible for kids, a lot of people wonder what you do all day.
Lost librarian / Gained other staff: gained technology integrationists	While we lost librarian expertise, we gained by hiring technology integrationists who already had great relationships with teachers. There was a huge infusion of new energy and skills around instructional technology, and the district saved money.
Lost librarian / Gained more classroom space	In addition to losing librarian time, our high school is so crowded, we had to take part of the library for classrooms, leaving less space for books.
Lost librarian / Gained more classroom space	Space was a tradeoff. Our library is more of a classroom space now. So, we had to remove a lot of books. High school kids don't check out books like they used to--they all have MacBooks. The way our high school is headed, we will have hardly any books.

*Lose-Lose Disadvantages*

Many interviewees who reported making negative decisions about school librarian staffing acknowledged the negative consequences of those decisions for both students and teachers. Sometimes, district or school leaders feel they have no other choice, even though they know that cutting a librarian position—perhaps the last one in a district or school—will have undesirable consequences. They know that such cuts mean less collaboration between librarians and teachers, less stand-alone instruction by librarians, less support for teachers from librarians, and less worthwhile use of library space. (See Table 33.)

## Voices of Decision-Makers

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**Table 33. Lose-Lose Disadvantages of Eliminating, Reducing, Combining or Reclassifying Librarians**

Disadvantage	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Lost librarian / Students suffered: State requirements forced choice	As an administrator, a one-time classroom teacher, and even a parent, I know how important it is to have a strong school library and librarian. But, in our state, other positions are required, while a librarian is not. It is frustrating to feel little choice but to take something away from our kids that I know will harm their academic growth.
Lost librarian / Students suffered: Reading scores suffer as circulation shifts from print to digital	The downside is a lack of equity and access. District staff can't cover for every librarian who has been cut. Students not doing as well in reading is the biggest learning impact. Where librarians have been lost, print circulation has declined, while digital information use has surged.
Lost librarian / Lost collaboration between librarian and teachers: Future administrators may devalue understaffed libraries	When we lose librarians, it's more than just an immediate loss for one school or district; it's a potential long-term loss. Many teachers are going to move on into administrative roles. Then, they're going to make decisions based on their recollection of a lone librarian who couldn't collaborate with teachers because she didn't have a library assistant.
Lost librarian / Lost collaboration with teachers: Resource curation now focus	Our reduction in librarian FTE took time away from our media specialist's co-teaching role. Teachers used to bring classes to the library for the librarian's help with research projects, and we can't do that at the same level now. All she has time to do is build resources instead of collaborate with teachers.
Lost librarian / Lost stand-alone instruction: Teaching information literacy suffers	Our teachers have classroom libraries; but, that's nothing compared to having a librarian in a library—with so many more options—helping students understand how to verify and analyze sources. Some of that happens in our English classrooms; but, this loss definitely has had a negative impact on our district and its students.
Lost librarian / Lost stand-alone instruction: Aides can't replace librarians	Our former librarian could help our kids in ways the aide there now cannot. All the aide can cover is more rudimentary things, such as the basics of locating resources.
Lost librarian / Lost stand-alone instruction: Critical thinking suffers	Critical thinking suffered when we decreased our investments in library services.
Lost librarian / Lost support of teachers by librarian: Lost technology integration	We need someone who understands how to integrate technology into classroom instruction, and who can co-teach with, and provide professional development for, teachers. Teachers need help in using different platforms in their classrooms. Not having that person has been tough.
Lost librarian / Lost utility of library space: Student workers insufficient	I wanted the kids reading as much as possible. With no librarian or even an aide, two students were checking out books, but nobody was getting them back in order on the shelves. Let alone anything else. It wasn't good.