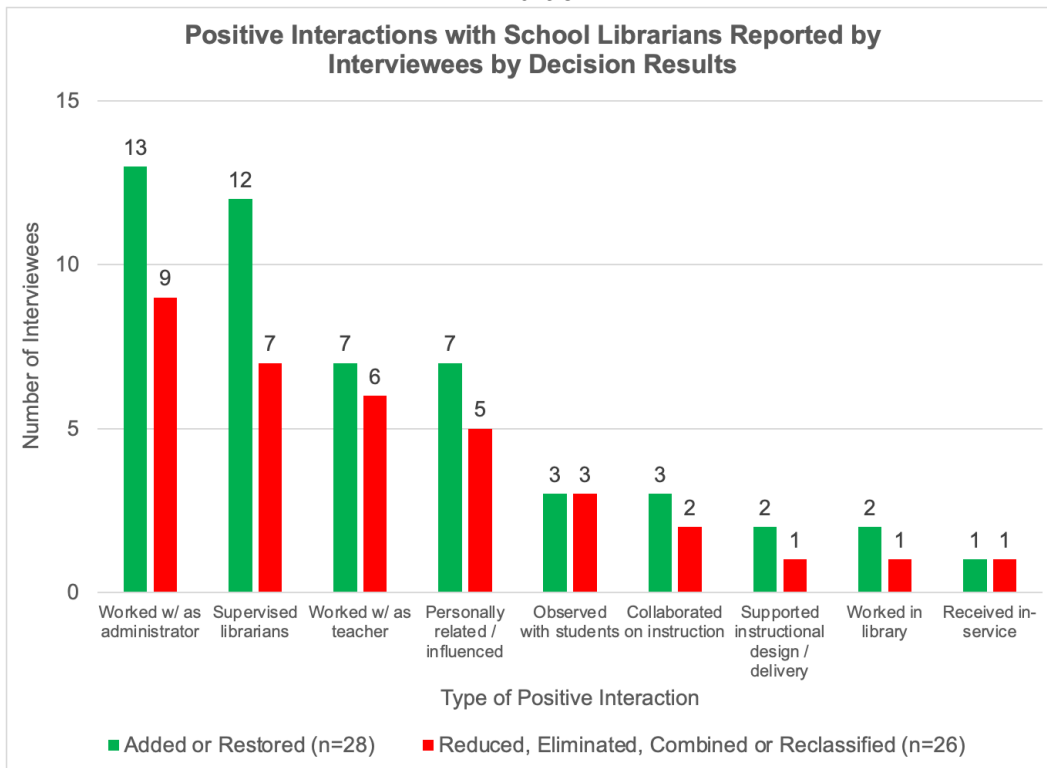


Voices of Decision-Makers
How District & School Leaders Decide About School Librarian Employment

Interactions of Interviewees with Librarians

Observers of school leaders’ decisions about school librarian employment may question what kind of interactions those leaders are having, or have had, with librarians and how—whether positive or negative—that affects their decision-making. Interestingly, both leaders who added or restored librarians and those who reduced, eliminated, combined, or reclassified them shared similar kinds of positive interactions with librarians. Notably, though, substantially more leaders who made positive decisions about librarians reported having worked with them as administrators, particularly in a supervisory capacity. Noticeably fewer leaders who made negative decisions about librarians reported similar positive interactions. Beyond that, while the numbers reporting other kinds of experiences were only in single digits, there were no other major differences between positive and negative decision-makers in the numbers of interviewees reporting most other kinds of interactions with librarians. That included such positive interactions as: observing their interactions with students, collaborating with them on instructional design and delivery, receiving instruction support from them, and having received in-service from them. (See Chart 8.)

Chart 8.



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Most decision-makers' accounts of positive interactions with librarians were divided easily between experiences they had as administrators and those they had as teachers. As administrators, many interviewees had either worked with librarians previously in an administrative role or supervised them. And, at least one received in-service professional development from a team of librarians when entering a new administrator role. School leaders who had worked with librarians previously as classroom teachers reported a range of experiences: collaborating with librarians on design and delivery of instruction, receiving support from librarians for their own design and delivery of instruction, observing students' library use, actually working in a library themselves, and receiving in-service professional development from librarians. The district and school leaders interviewed described a wide variety of examples of these formative experiences with their librarian colleagues. Notably, this was probably the easiest question for practically all of the interviewees to answer—for good or ill, they all had personal experiences with librarians to share. Interestingly, it does not appear that any of the interviewees had come to their current administrator role without any previous experience of school librarians. Perhaps that biased the interviewees to volunteer to be interviewed, or perhaps it suggests that most administrators are not as inexperienced at working with librarians as many suspect. Some interviewees were candid about their negative perceptions of, and experiences with, librarians.

Positive Interactions as Administrators with Librarians

Interviewees who reported having positive interactions as administrators with librarians clearly valued the impact that a highly effective school librarian can have on the whole educational eco-system. They recounted how administrators, teachers, librarians, and students worked together. They credited library spaces coming alive under the leadership of an excellent librarian. They described how a skilled librarian can help a school negotiate controversy when library materials are challenged. And they explained how the best school librarians helped them as new administrators and their fellow librarians make the most of library programs. (See Table 34.)

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Table 34. Positive Interactions of Interviewees as Administrators with Librarians

Type of Interaction	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Worked with as district/school administrator: Resource for students, teachers and administrators	As an administrator, I've witnessed a media specialist being a force for positivity. A principal in a school I was working with started to realize that the media specialist wasn't just an extra resource for teachers and students, but also an extra resource for the principal. The principal realized that the media specialist was truly a leader in that building—someone who talked regularly with and influenced all of its teachers.
Worked with as district/school administrator: Library as collaborative learning space	I've had a lot of opportunities to work with librarians. To be in those spaces, and to see how students use them—both well and not-so-well—helped drive what I think a library should look like. A library is a community space where you can bring people together. It impacts the school climate, particularly collaboration. We want to bring the whole community to it. We want to use it as a model of what education can be like.
Worked with as district/school administrator: Book challenge	There was a book on one of our reading lists that some parents thought controversial. Our librarian was integral to the conversations about how you choose a book with your child, and why these books are published. Kids need to see themselves in different types of literature. Her expertise needed to be there. Your library becomes a living place instead of a book repository because of that person.
Worked with as district/school administrator: Exemplary librarians	As a vice principal and principal, I worked closely with some phenomenal librarians. They helped me learn what to look for when hiring a librarian. They knew how to engage kids—whether through encouraging them to read books or teaching them how to access information via technology. I want all of our kids to know the excitement of being able to access knowledge that's beyond their usual sphere.
Supervised: Librarians who make the most of library space	When I supervised librarians, I saw the power of these large, beautiful spaces where kids can find quiet time for learning, for getting lost in books, and for creating. Every school should have someone to provide those opportunities to our children.
Supervised: Elevating learning across the board	I just completed a unit observation with the library media specialist, watching our 2 nd grade students get excited about coding. Only 7 or 8 years old, they learned terms like algorithm! Whatever the topic, the library media specialist is elevating student learning, helping them learn concepts that are going to help them in math, science and other classes. I think it's a huge success.
Received in-service from: Learning as new administrator	As a new district administrator, I had a couple of veteran librarians pull me aside and say: "We are going to teach you what we do." They were great role models of effective school librarianship to their principals. It really helped.
Received in-service from: Learning as new district library leader	I was part of the LILEAD fellowship. There's not a lot of support in the library community for district library leaders to learn how to make a difference. That experience gave me the chance to learn from other districts and make powerful connections.
Worked in a library	I put myself through college as a public library clerk. Today, of course, my school library looks dramatically different. Then, people called us to settle bar bets that they can now settle themselves by consulting Google on their smartphones. Still, I always encourage teachers who show any interest to get their library science endorsement. I truly believe that, despite all the changes, what our school librarians do is important.

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Positive Interactions as Teachers with Librarians

Interviewees who had positive personal experiences as teachers with librarians were equally clear about how much they valued highly effective librarians as collaborators and supporters. They especially noted the contributions librarians often make to ensuring educational equity, particularly for students requiring extra attention. In at least one case, this was an “echo” of the administrator’s own under-privileged-childhood experiences with libraries and librarians. (See Table 35.)

Table 35. Positive Interactions of Interviewees as Teachers with Librarians

Type of Interaction	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Worked with as classroom teacher: Librarian as information-seeking support system	I marvel at our librarian’s ability to shift from the needs of one student or group of students to another. One minute, a group of students needs help starting the research process; the next minute, it’s an individual wanting help finding detailed information about bio-medical research; and, the minute after that, it’s another student wondering what to wear to prom. When I see so many kids in a library, I know we have the right person in that job; they are being a resource, a support system those kids truly need.
Worked with as classroom teacher: Librarian as literacy-gap closer	When I started teaching, it was the certified high school librarian who convinced me that it’s our role to create opportunities to close the literacy gap. She really opened my eyes.
Personally related to or influenced by: Childhood library experiences	When I was growing up, my parents taking me to the library was a big deal. We didn’t have a lot of books at our house; so, getting to go to the library and check out books—so varied in topics and depth—was exciting. As a teacher, I brought that love of libraries to my relationship with my librarian.
Observed students’ library use: Own children	My children are in the school system right now and every week, when they come home from their library, they have a new book. I see the excitement on their faces: “Look, I brought home a new book ... we need to read this!” So, I understand the value of a strong library program, not just from a teacher’s perspective, but as a parent. It means a lot to my kids—and all kids—to have access to a well-managed library in their school. They are able to find more and newer books that interest to them than they would have access to otherwise.
Collaborated with me/my teachers on design/delivery of instruction: Tag-team teaching and troubleshooting	My librarian and I usually partnered on teaching research assignments, each teaching different things. When I was Battle of the Books sponsor, my librarian helped me coach the kids. She also made sure that we had access to needed books. Anytime I noticed kids struggling, I’d say “Hey, can you help me with this?” And I knew she would.
Supported my/my teachers’ design/delivery of instruction: Love of reading as foundation of learning	As a kindergarten teacher, I had students who loved going to the library, especially bringing back that first book. They were so excited. The role of librarians is to see students, spend time with them, and foster a love of reading.

Negative Interactions as Administrators with Librarians

Only 12 of the 49 interviewees reported negative interactions with librarians. These decision-makers were candid that, while the position of school librarian is a valuable one, its value can be undercut dramatically by simply having the wrong person in the job. Others acknowledged that their negative perceptions of school librarians could be

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traced to a variety of related factors. Some acknowledged that a generally poor school climate contributed to their negative experiences. Others attributed their experiences to unqualified staff being assigned to work as librarians. Still others described lack of consensus about the school librarian’s role, outright bad hiring decisions, and librarian burnout. Perhaps most notably, negative interactions were associated with the failure of educator preparation programs to teach prospective administrators and teachers about school libraries and librarians. (See Table 36.)

Table 36. Negative Interactions of Interviewees as Administrators with Librarians

Type of Interaction	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Worked with as district/school administrator: good and bad librarians make lasting impressions	I've seen good librarians and bad ones. The ones that don't do a good job leave a bad taste in people's mouths. When administrators and teachers have bad experiences with folks like that, it can influence their perceptions for a long time.
Worked with as district/school administrator	We have focused on re-educating our librarians, because some are curmudgeons who are set in their ways. We've had to bring those librarians along.
Supervised: Ed-tech staff outperformed librarians at teaching digital literacy	Digital literacy is taught by our tech integrationist and digital citizenship, by the librarian. I have a huge amount of appreciation for the tech integrationists, who I feel are a step closer to the classroom in terms of working with teachers on a daily basis. Part of what happened is a move from centralized information to de-centralized information, changing how students access primary sources and research materials. It doesn't require a field trip to the media center any longer. We are following the natural trend from one center of information to everyone holding that power.
Supervised: Unqualified paraprofessional overwhelmed	When I was a principal, I had a paraprofessional who acted as the librarian. She was always griping about how the kids left the library so messy. They were always messing up her books.
Supervised: Librarians difficult and ineffective	The librarians were really difficult to manage and supervise. The personality and style of the librarian has a lot to do with the level of support within the building for that individual. We had a librarian in an elementary school who was a pain to deal with. The rest of the staff were worn out by it. Teachers delivered students to the library and left. At middle and high school levels, it was even worse. Our previous high school librarian had been there for a long time. Teachers didn't want to collaborate with her; they didn't even want to take their classes to the library. So, the library was empty all the time, and there were books on the shelves that students weren't reading. The personality of the individual in this position is critical.
Received in-service from: Gap in administrator preparation	Administrators have to learn about libraries and librarians on the job, whether formally or informally. They don't get any training in academic classes on the impact of libraries and librarians on learning. That's something that needs to start happening at the university level.

Interviewees who referenced negative experiences with librarians as teachers echoed those referencing administrator experiences. (See Table 37.)

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Table 37. Negative Interactions of Interviewees as Teachers with Librarians

Type of Interaction	Examples / Quotes from Interviewees
Worked with as classroom teacher: Witnessed teacher hostility to working with librarian	When I taught, some of my teacher colleagues were very defensive of their turf. They didn't want anyone else interjecting themselves into their classrooms. They didn't want to work with the librarian at all.
Worked with as classroom teacher: Early teacher perception of librarian as easier job	When I taught in a classroom, I always thought librarian was the best gig in the world—you just sat there and read to kids. You probably even got a helper.
Personally related to or influenced by	The librarians I know love to curl up with a great book. I love to read, too. I like reading an e-book, listening to an audio book, and holding a physical book. I like reading an actual newspaper; but, I also don't mind reading it online. I've had to learn. Some librarians are stuck in "curl up with a good book" mode--and there's just no space for that in our schools anymore.
No librarian support for teachers on design/delivery of instruction: invisible librarian	A librarian just does a minimal job: checks out books, does library orientation, punches the clock, and leaves. As a result, in that school, the librarian is invisible, and the value of the library program is diminished. Is it any surprise when an administrator asks, why do we need it?
No support for teachers' design/delivery of instruction: Comparing current school to previous one	My current school does not compare well with my last one, which is a 21 st century learning school. At the previous school, technology is better integrated into instruction. It isn't about Apple TVs, iPads, etc.; it's about a school culture that facilitates collaborative learning. That's not happening yet at my current school.
No quality in-service: Some librarians out of touch	Theoretically, librarians should be instructional coaches, although I would argue that, in my experience, many librarians wouldn't be comfortable doing that. They've been removed from the classroom for too long.

Surprisingly, seven of these 12 interviewees decided to add or restore school librarians, despite reporting negative interactions with them. Many of their negative experiences became learning opportunities that enabled them to have more positive, subsequent experiences with librarians. From negative experiences, they learned what they did not want in a librarian, and that affected their hiring of librarians in the future.