

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

Decision-Making Themes for Positive Staffing Decisions

Decision-makers identified multiple factors influencing their staffing decisions about school librarians. Several webs of co-occurrences of these factors suggest seven themes in their decision-making, four for those who decided to add or restore librarians and three for those who decided to reduce, eliminate, combine, or reclassify librarians. As the number of co-occurring factors and frequency of their concurrence with each other varied in complexity and strength, they will be described for each type of decision—positive and negative—in descending order for positive and negative decisions about school librarian employment.

The four themes which summarize most positive decisions about school librarians have been named:

- Librarians for Equity of Access,
- New Leadership, New Priorities,
- More Teaching by Librarians, and
- Opportunity to Meet Mandate

Librarians for Equity of Access

The three positive-decision factors with the most concurrences are change in priorities, stand-alone instruction by librarians, and equity of access to librarians. In turn, each of these factors had multiple concurring factors, often shared ones. Together, these factors and their concurring factors comprise the theme, Librarians for Equity of Access. (See Table 38.)

Decision-makers who made a change in priorities identified most frequently the wish for greater equity of access to librarians as the most influential other factor in their decision. Often, too, they reported the availability of new funding as a factor that made it possible to increase librarian staffing levels. Other factors, each credited for influencing their positive staffing decision included stand-alone instruction by librarians, their contributions to facilitating planning time for teachers, and their collaboration on the design and delivery of instruction with teachers. Other factors which sometimes enabled such positive decisions were a change in the district or school administration and the presence of a state mandate for having librarians.

Table 38. Librarians for Equity of Access

Change in Priorities (13)	Stand-Alone Instruction (11)	Equity of Access to Librarians (10)
Equity of access to librarians (7)	Equity of access to librarians (6)	Change in priorities (7)
New funding (6)	Planning time for teachers (5)	Stand-alone instruction (6)
Stand-alone instruction (5)	Change in priorities (5)	New funding (3)
Change in administration (4)	Collaboration with teachers (5)	
Planning time for teachers (4)	New funding (4)	
Collaboration with teachers (3)		
State mandate (3)		

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The second most frequently mentioned factor for this theme is valuing stand-alone instruction by librarians. Increasing equity of access to school librarians was also the most frequently cited factor by those placing a high value on instruction by librarians. This factor is followed by facilitating planning time for teachers and collaborating with them on instructional design and delivery. Factors sometimes associated with stand-alone instruction by librarians were a change in priorities and new funding. Finally, the third most oft-cited factor is the one that figured prominently in the two preceding groups, equity of access to librarians. Of those who mentioned that factor as a decision driver, stand-alone instruction provided by librarians was a concurring factor, while changes in priorities and new funding were factors that made it possible.

Across these three complexes of factors, change in priorities, equity of access to librarians, stand-alone instruction by librarians, and new funding are present in all three. This combination of factors suggests that leaders likelier to make positive decisions are ones to whom educational equity in general is a concern and who understand the contribution that a librarian's stand-alone instruction can have in closing equity gaps.

More Teaching by Librarians

After Librarians for Equity, the next largest complex of most frequently cited factors with the most concurring factors was named More Teaching by Librarians. This theme is comprised of four factors which tied together several concurring factors. Its four principal factors are new funding, opening of a new school building, collaboration between librarians and teachers, and facilitating planning time for teachers. (See Table 39.)

Positive decision-makers who mentioned new funding also mentioned changes in priorities, stand-alone instruction by librarians, and planning time for teachers. A state mandate for school librarians was mentioned by a few as a contributor to making decisions based on these factors.

Decision-makers who identified planning time for teachers as an influential factor were also ones who sometimes credited changes in priorities and instruction by librarians—whether on their own or collaborating with teachers. Notably, interviewees who identified teacher planning time as a factor in their decisions to add or restore librarians did not perceive librarians as babysitters; they saw sending students to the library so teachers could have a planning period as a win-win opportunity for librarians to have an opportunity to deliver instruction on their own. Intriguingly, though, they did not perceive a conflict between having teachers plan on their own and valuing collaboration on instructional design and delivery between librarians and teachers. These decisions focused on teacher planning time were also sometimes influenced by new funding.

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Table 39. More Teaching by Librarians

New Funding (8)	Planning Time for Teachers (7)	Collaboration with Teachers (7)	New Building (7)
Change in priorities (6)	Stand-alone instruction (5)	Stand-alone instruction (5)	Collaboration with teachers (3)
Stand-alone instruction (4)	Change in priorities (4)	Change in priorities (3)	
Planning time for teachers (3)	Collaboration with teachers (3)	Planning time for teachers (3)	
State mandate (3)	New funding (3)	New building (3)	

Decision-makers who increased librarian staffing were likely to credit librarian collaboration with teachers for their decisions. Of those who cited this factor, stand-alone instruction by librarians was the most frequent co-occurring factor. Three additional factors which sometimes influenced pro-collaboration decisions included changes in priorities, teacher planning time, and openings of new school buildings.

Another factor cited by as many positive decision-makers as teacher planning time and librarian-teacher collaboration was opening of new school buildings. Its lone concurring factor was valuing librarian-teacher collaboration.

Across these four complexes of factors, changes in priorities, stand-alone instruction by librarians, planning time for teachers, and collaboration with teachers were present in three of the four sets of factors. These findings suggest that leaders who are more likely to make positive decisions about librarians are those who understand that librarians not only teach on their own but support and collaborate with classroom teachers.

New Leadership, New Priorities

The next theme was named New Leadership, New Priorities, because a change in administration was its most frequently cited factor, and, for that group, the single concurring factor was change in priorities. Some interviewees who chose to add school librarians were clear that they strongly valued librarians and were in a position to act on it. They rarely felt the need to identify any other factors to justify their decisions; it was simply a high priority in and of itself. (See Table 40.) This theme emphasizes that changes of administration and/or priorities present opportunities for new administrators to act on their established beliefs in the value of school libraries and librarians.

Table 40. New Leadership, New Priorities

Change in Administration (9)
Change in priorities (4)

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Opportunity to Meet Mandate

Finally, Opportunity to Meet Mandate is the theme based on one of the least frequently mentioned factors, state mandates for school librarians. That factor has two concurring factors—new funding and change in priorities—each shared by three of the four decision-makers citing mandates. (See Table 41.)

Table 41. Opportunity to Meet Mandate

State Mandate (4)
New funding (3)
Change in priorities (3)

Decision-Making Themes for Negative Staffing Decisions

Three themes that explain the most negative decisions about school librarians have been named:

- New Priorities, More Specialists & Teachers,
- Can't Find a Librarian, and
- New Leadership, New Priorities

New Priorities, More Specialists & Teachers

Of these three themes, the first, strongest, and most complex one is no surprise. This theme is called New Priorities, More Specialists & Teachers. (See Table 42.)

Predictably, its most oft-cited factor influencing negative decisions about librarians is budget constraints. That factor has several concurring factors that reveal more about the thinking behind those decisions. Of those citing budget constraints, the majority also mentioned changes in priorities. The other factors they mentioned suggest, to some extent, what those priorities might have been: hiring other specialists or coaches (e.g., reading, literacy, STEM), needing more teachers, and needing the incumbent librarian in another position. Other factors contributing to decreases in librarian staffing blamed on budget constraints included believing librarians were obsolete—or at least, less necessary than in the past— changes in administration, and “pipeline” issues recruiting qualified candidates for librarian vacancies.

The second most frequently mentioned factor associated with this theme was changes in priorities. Of those citing priority changes, several preferred to hire other specialists or coaches. Contributing factors were priority change, believing librarians are obsolete, and changes in administration.

The third most-cited factor in this group was needing the incumbent librarian in another position. The dilemma facing many “teacher librarians” is that, if they are credentialed as both teachers and librarians, they are subject to be reassigned to classrooms. That scenario is reflected in the concurring factors: budget constraints, changes in