



# Inequities in Access to School Librarians:

Research from the *School Librarian Investigation:  
Decline or Evolution?* (SLIDE) Project



AASL Conference: October 21, 2023

[libslide.org](http://libslide.org) - @libslide - #libslide

# Agenda

- Introduction
- SLIDE project background
- Literature review
- Methodology
- Findings
- Summary
- Q&A



# Introduction

This session will share the latest research from this IMLS-funded project, The School Librarian Investigation--Decline or Evolution? (SLIDE) led by Dr. Keith Curry Lance and Debra Kachel. The findings reveal a pressing educational equity issue tied to school librarian access.

# About SLIDE

Project Director:

Debra E. Kachel

Affiliate Faculty, School of Education,  
School Library Media Endorsement  
Program, Antioch University Seattle



Principal Investigator:

Keith Curry Lance, Ph.D.

Consultant, RSL Research Group,  
Louisville, CO



*The SLIDE project was made possible in part by  
the [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#)  
Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Grant  
[Project RE-246368-OLS-20](#).*

# SLIDE Project Phases

*Quantitative Phase:  
Perspectives on School  
Librarian Employment*

Determines trends over time in school library employment from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

*The COVID-19 Pandemic  
& Inequities in Access to  
School Librarians*

A SLIDE Special Report on the impact of COVID-19 on school libraries and employment

*Qualitative Phase: Voices  
of Decision-Makers*

Interview decision-makers in school districts that have reported the greatest librarian gains and losses over the past five years

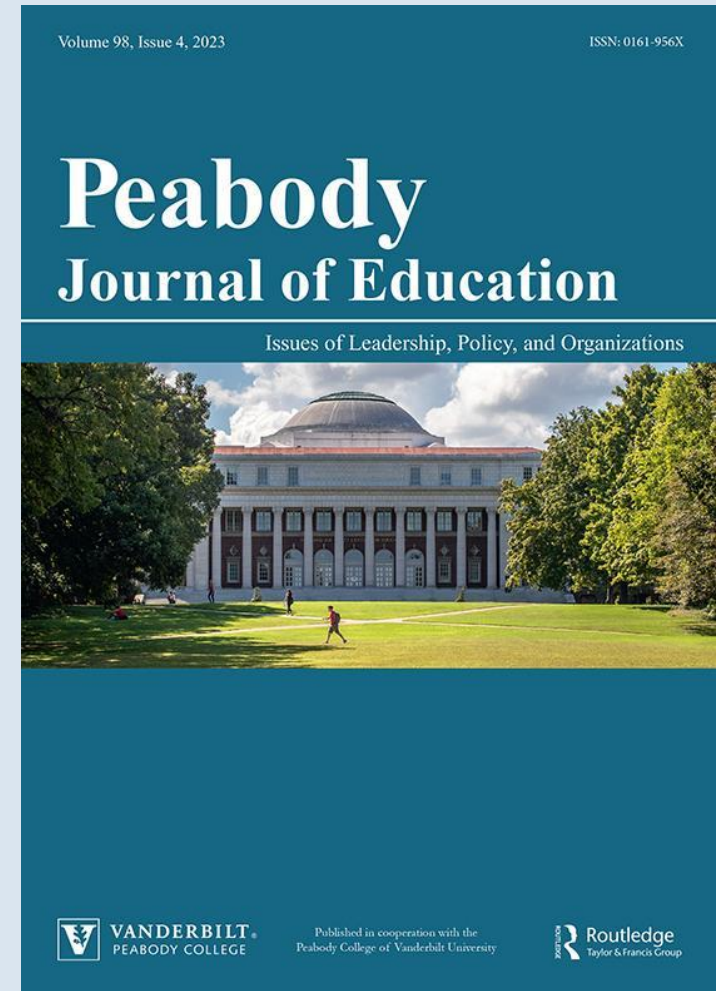


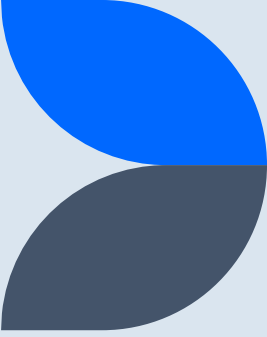
# The School Librarian Equity Gap:

Inequities Associated with Race and Ethnicity Compounded by Poverty, Locale, and Enrollment

Open access:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2023.2160112>

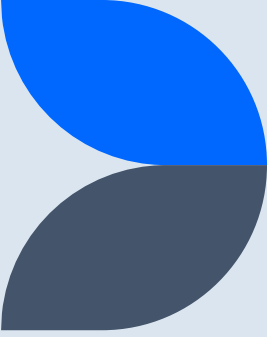




# Literature review

- The impact of certified school librarians on student achievement is well documented; this research remains largely unrecognized outside of school library circles
- In times of budget cuts, the perception that librarians are “nice to have” but nonessential results in position cuts or reductions
- Many school librarians have been assigned or reassigned to other job responsibilities or positions
- Job loss in the field of school librarianship has largely worsened in recent decades

# Methodology



## Data analysis:

- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
  - Common Core of Data (CCD)
- 12,537 districts analyzed for 2020-21
- Data represent 47 states and D.C.
- Analysis of librarian staffing focused on districts with enough full-time librarians for every school (.75 or more full-time equivalents per school) and districts with no librarians



# Findings

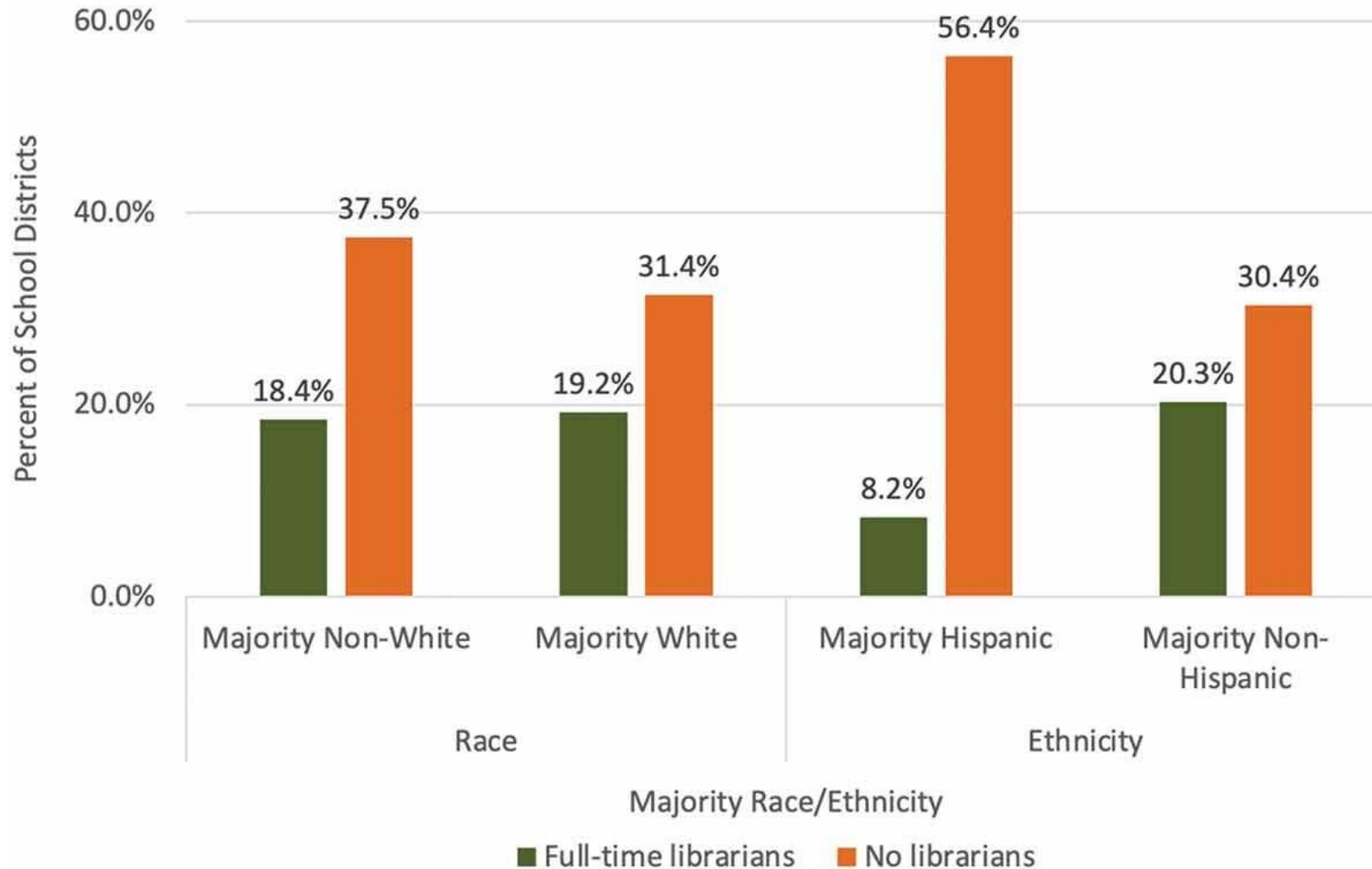


Access to school librarians is strongly related to both race and ethnicity and either persists or is exacerbated when selected district characteristics— specifically poverty, locale, and enrollment—are considered. And certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic has diminished access to school librarians



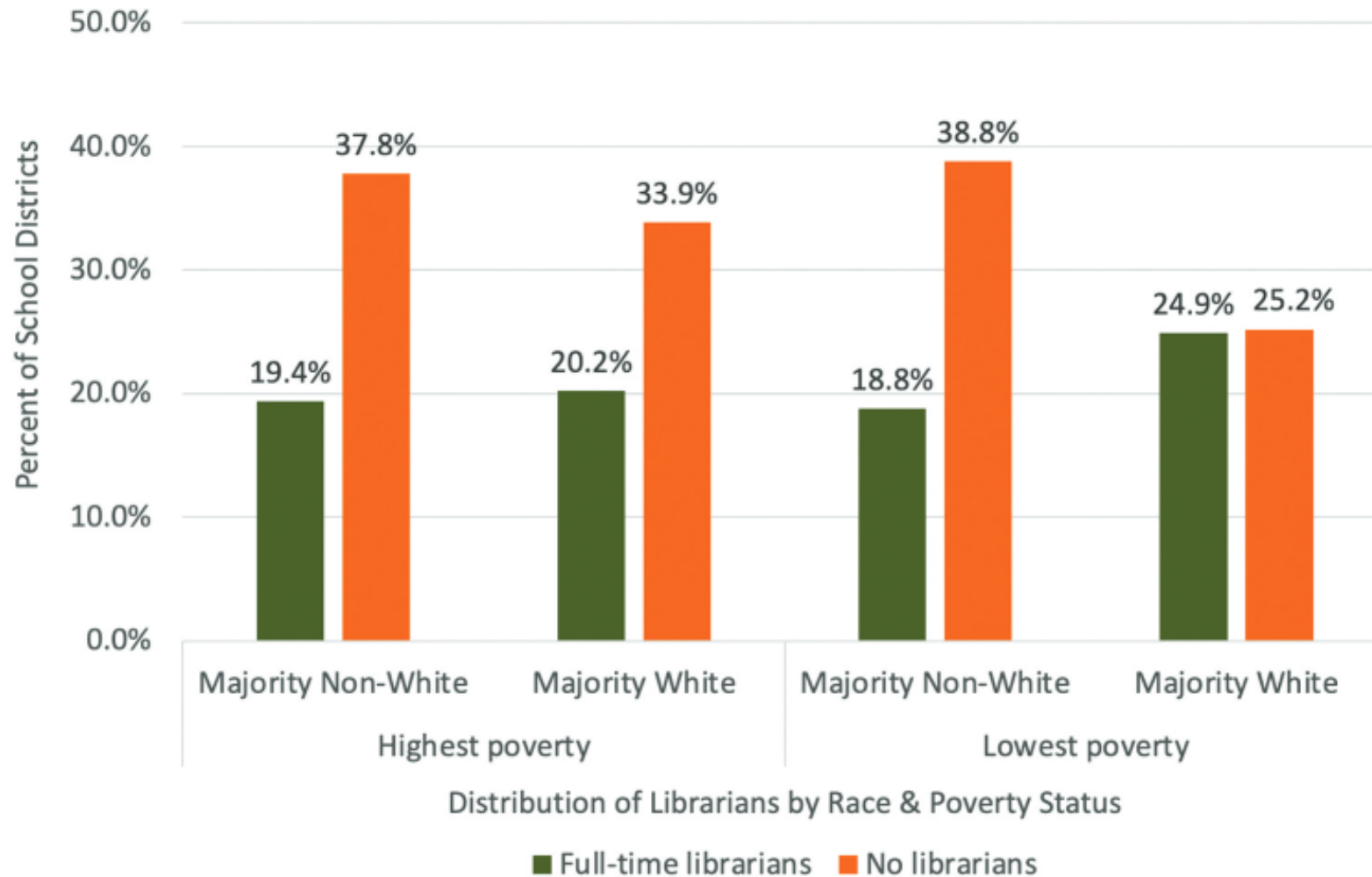
# Race & ethnicity inequities

District Ratio of Librarian FTE per School by Race/Ethnicity,  
Local School Districts, 2020-21



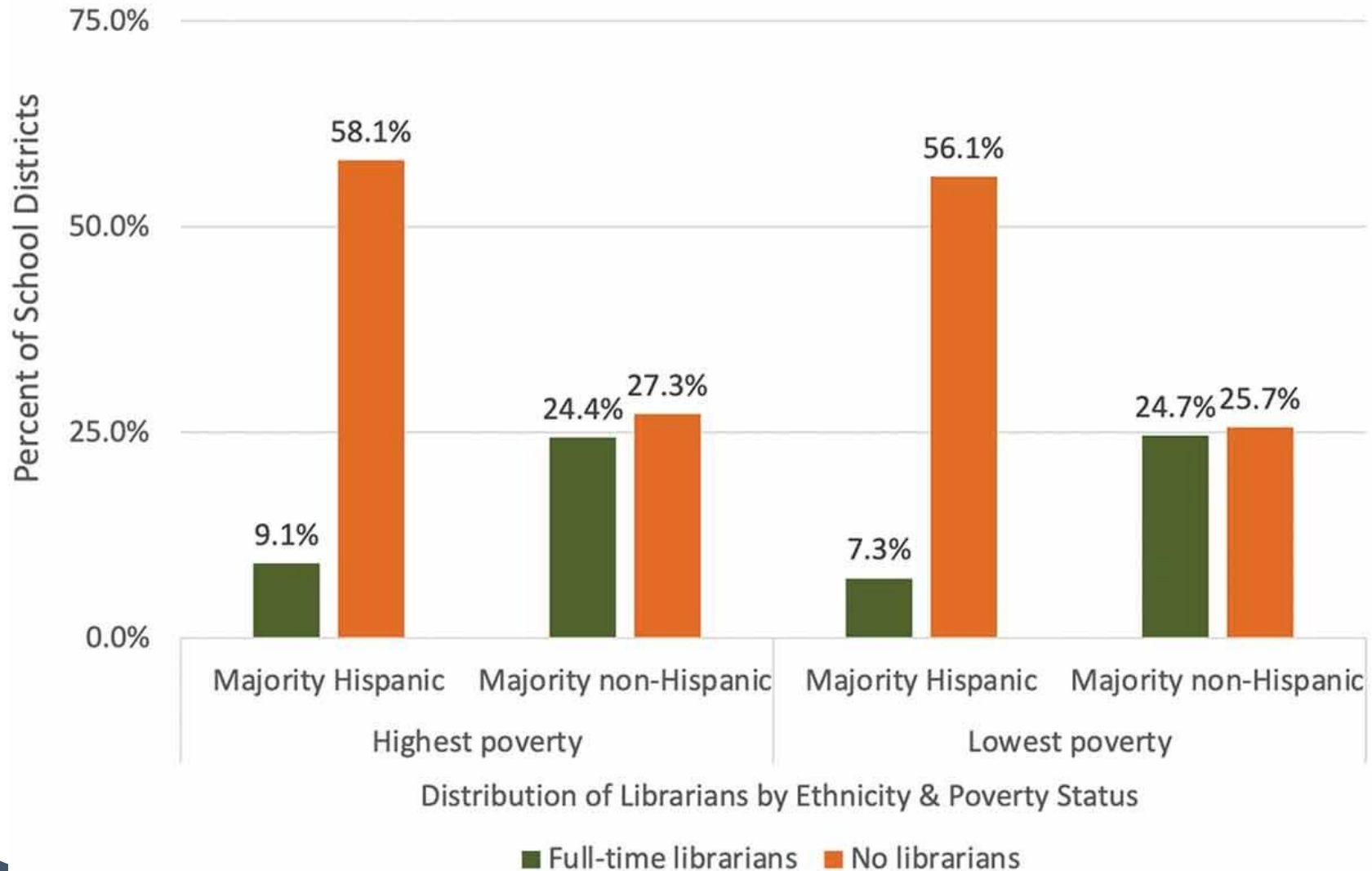
# Poverty & race inequities

Districts with a Full-Time Librarian in Every School and No Librarians  
by Race & Poverty Status, 2020-21

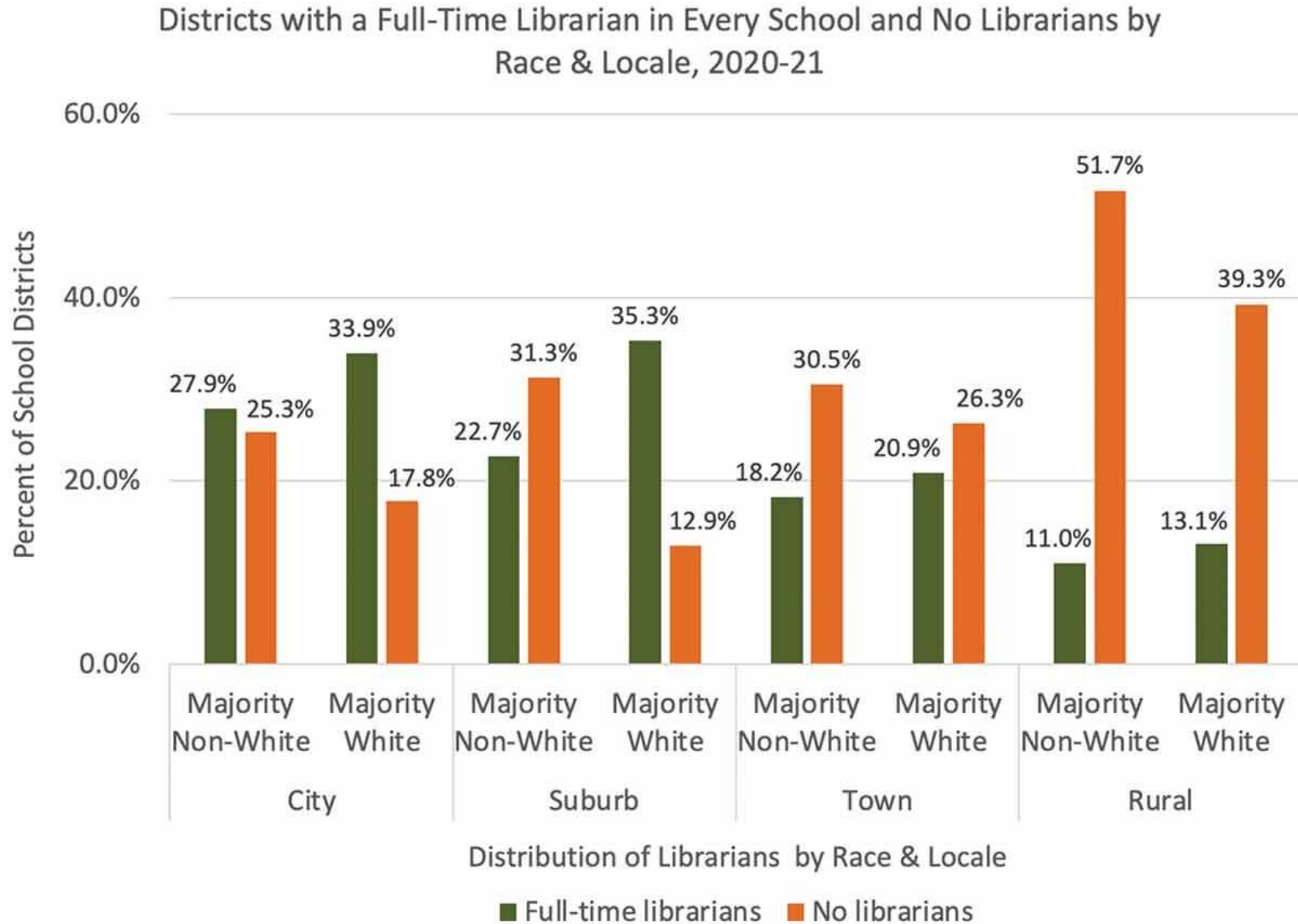


# Poverty & ethnicity inequities

Districts with a Full-Time Librarian in Every School and No Librarians by Ethnicity & Poverty Status, 2020-21

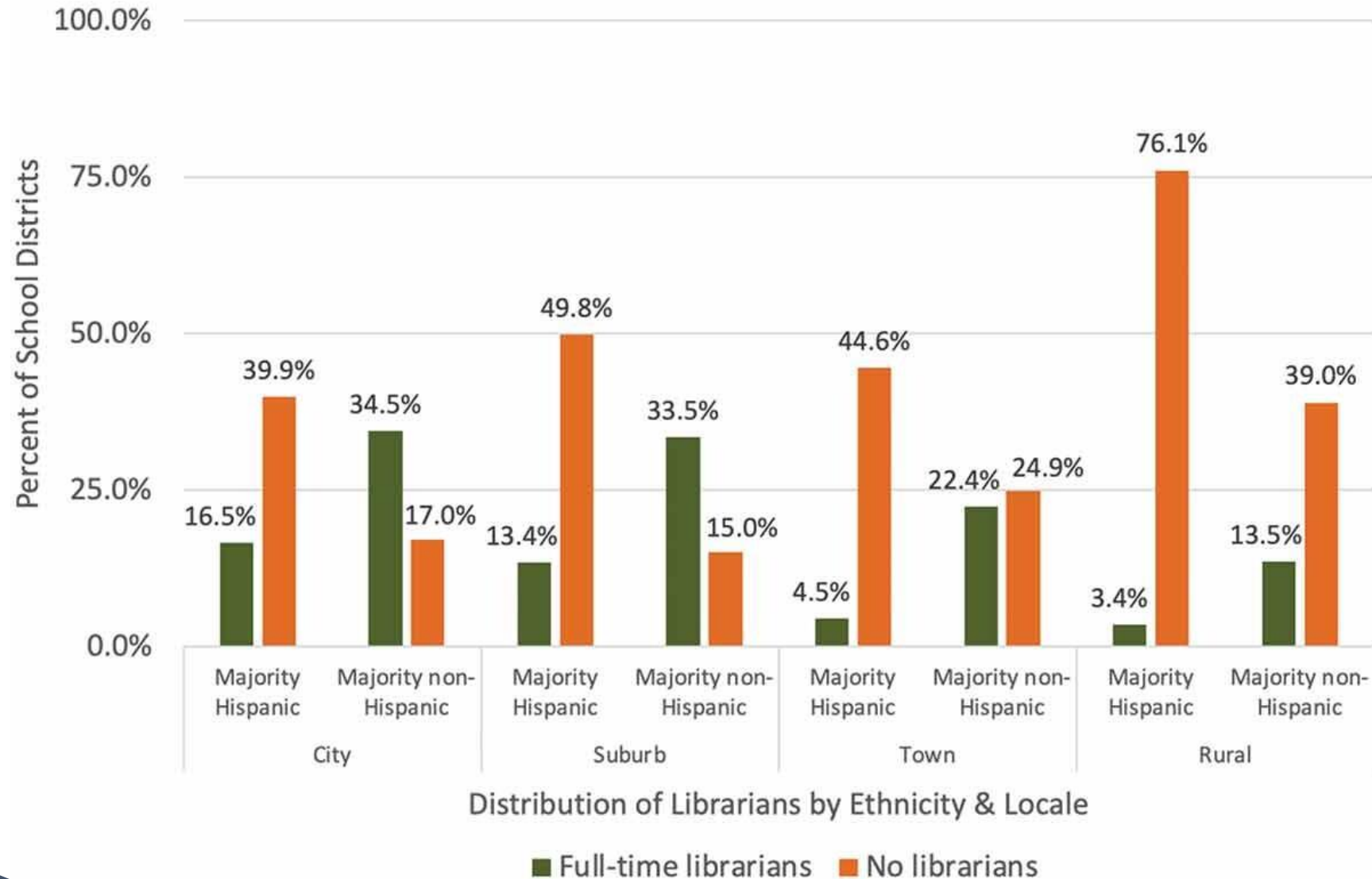


# Locale & racial inequities



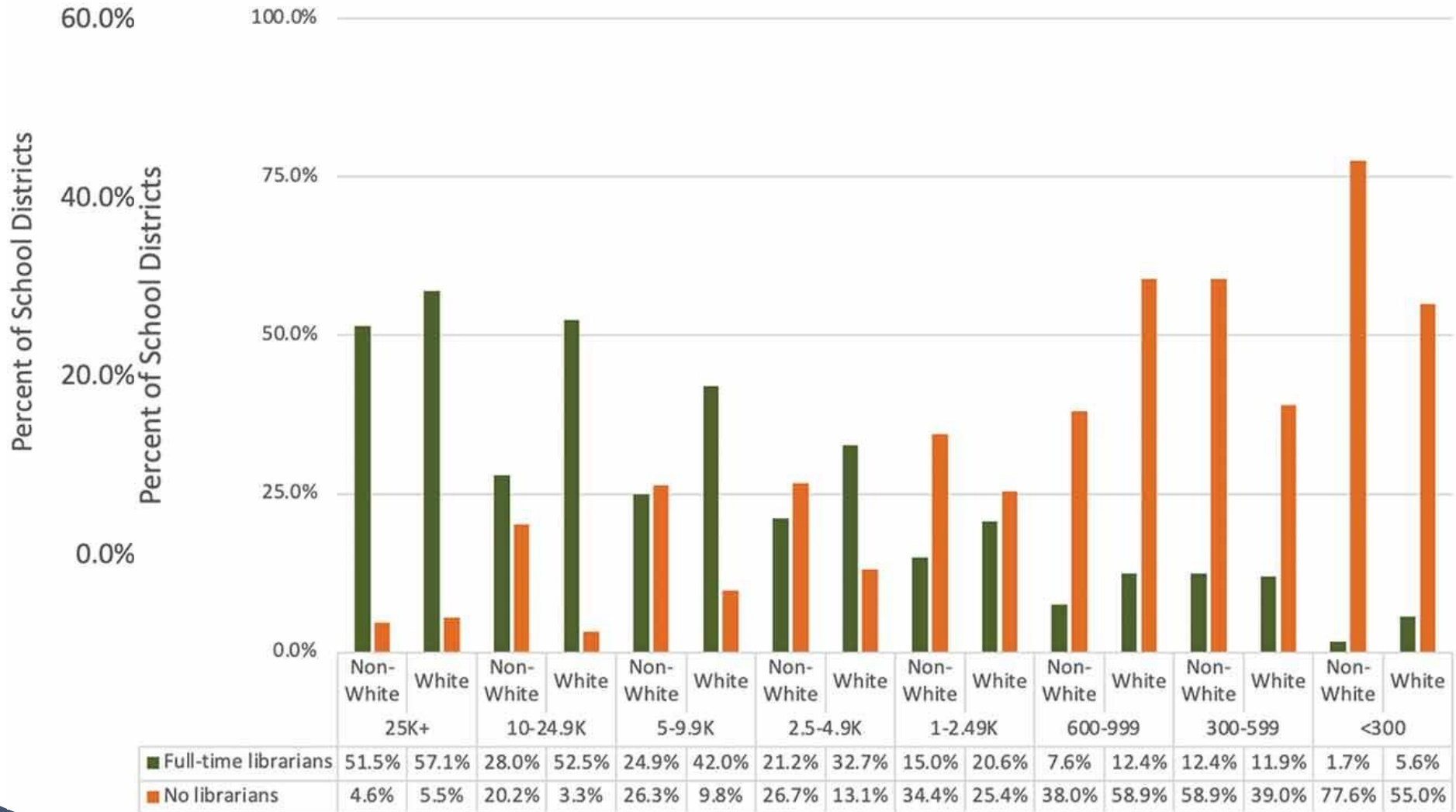
# Locale & ethnicity inequities

Districts with a Full-Time Librarian in Every School and No Librarians by Ethnicity & Locale, 2020-21



# Enrollment & racial inequities

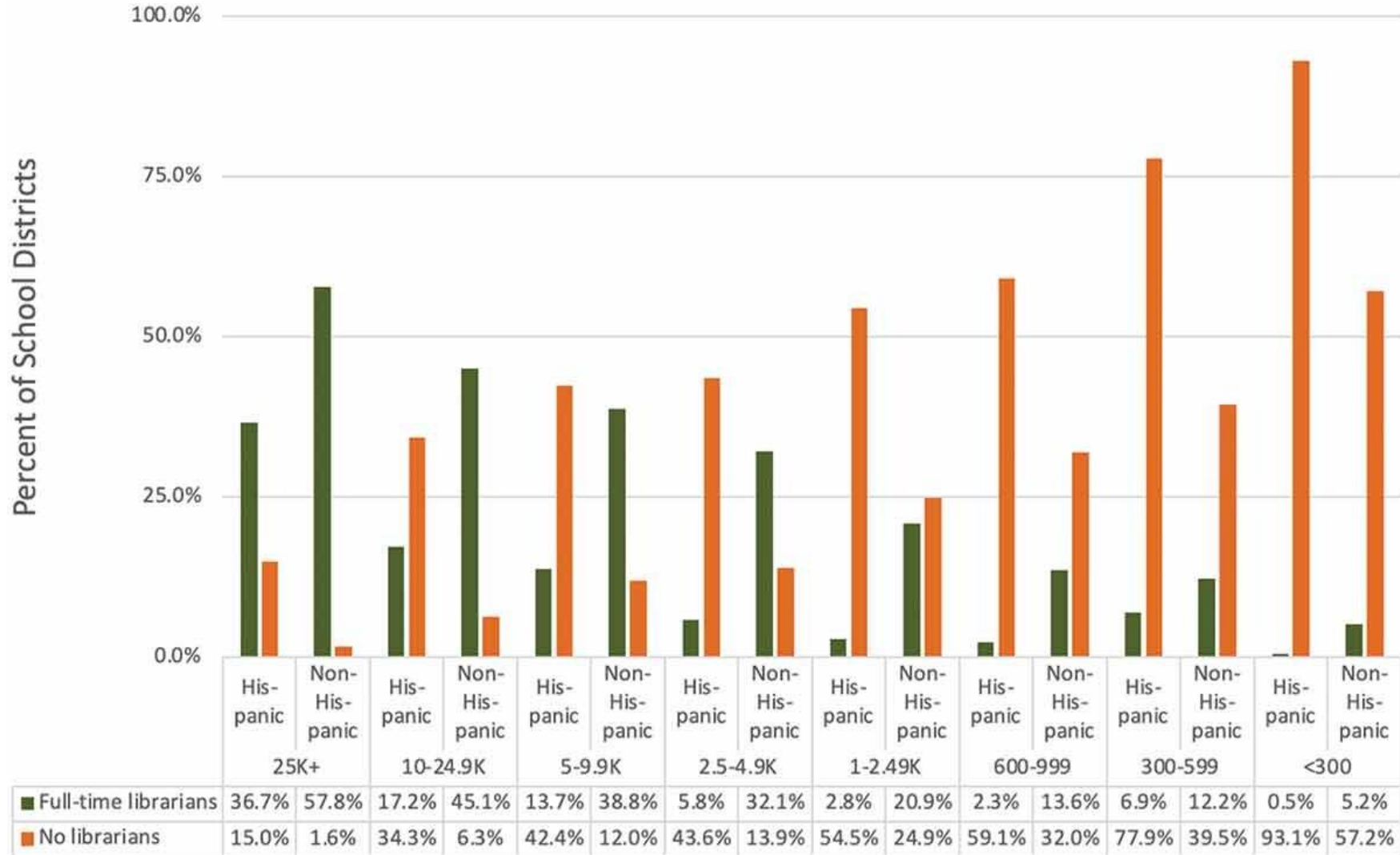
Districts with a Full-Time Librarian in Every School and No Librarians by Race & Enrollment, 2020-21





# Enrollment & ethnicity inequities

Districts with a Full-Time Librarian in Every School and No Librarians by Ethnicity & Enrollment, 2020-21



Distribution of Librarians by Majority Ethnicity & Enrollment Range



# Summary

Inequities associated with race and ethnicity were exacerbated considerably for students living in extreme poverty, in more-isolated locales, and in the smallest districts.

The lack of school librarians for preK–12 school students, teachers and their schools is becoming a growing issue of social justice and educational equity.

“

Students and teachers who have access to school librarians, therefore, have a decided advantage over those who do not—a library privilege. That makes access to school librarians an educational equity issue.

”

# Catch the next SLIDE session

*Voices of Decision-Makers about School Librarian Employment*

Presented by Debra Kachel & Christie Kaaland

Room #124 at 1:00 PM

# Learn more about SLIDE

Interactive data tools: <https://libslide.org/data-tools/>

Publications: <https://libslide.org/publications/>

SLIDE in the news: <https://libslide.org/news/>

# Questions?

## **Project Director**

Debra E. Kachel

Affiliate Faculty

Antioch University Seattle

dkachel@antioch.edu

## **Principal Investigator**

Keith Curry Lance

Consultant

RSL Research Group

keithlance@comcast.net