Voices of Decision-Makers about School Librarian Employment
Findings from the SLIDE IMLS Grant Project

AASL Conference, October 21, 2023
Debra E. Kachel, Project Director
Christie Kaaland, Advisory Council Member & Interviewer

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SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation - Decline or Evolution?

• Principal investigator: Keith Curry Lance
• Three-year grant project, 2020-2023
• Awarded to Antioch University Seattle
• Funded by the Institute for Museum and Library Services, Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian grant
Year 1 Report: Study of School Librarian NCES Data

- Major report: Perspectives on School Librarian Employment in the United States, 2009-10 to 2018-19
- Examined National Center for Education Statistics (annually self reported from every school district)
- Public school district data only, no school level
- Approx. 13,000 districts
- Also conducted a survey state supports and requirements Contexts of School Librarian Employment
Year 1 Report: Study of School Librarian NCES Data

- **Purpose:** show inequities, provide actual data national, state and district levels
- **District characteristics**
  - Enrollment, Locale, Per pupil expenditures
- **Student demographics**
  - Race, Ethnicity, Poverty (Free & Reduced Lunch Program)
- **Compared librarians to employment patterns of other educators**
- **Created interactive data tools for public use**

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Year 2 Report: Interviews of Decision Makers

- Major report: *Voices of Decision-Makers: How District & School Leaders Decide about School Librarian Employment*

- 49 school leaders from 29 states and D.C.
- Superintendents, assistant superintendents, or district-level administrators
- Confidential and individual via Zoom

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Phase 2 Report: Interviews of Decision Makers

- Purpose: learn priorities and choices in staffing school libraries
- In 3 sets of districts
  1. GAINED librarians
  2. LOST SOME librarians
  3. LOST ALL librarians
- Where changes occurred since 2015-16
### States Represented by Interviewees

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<th>State</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
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Interviewees by Position Type

Number of Interviewees

- District Superintendent / Asst Superintendent: 19
- Director, Libraries / Instructional Media: 9
- School Principal: 7
- Director, Curriculum / Instruction / Literacy: 5
- Director, Educational Technology: 5
- School Board Member / Trustee: 2
- Chief Info Officer: 1
- Human Resources: 1

N = 49
Districts Represented Among Interviewees

Districts were over-represented in:

• Larger student enrollment
• Urban areas
• Lower poverty levels

But highly representative in terms of race and ethnicity

Photo by Unknown

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Three Types of Decisions

1. **Structural factors**
   - Felt they had little or no control over the decision
   - Included hiring staff to address state mandates, opening/closing of buildings, and “pipeline” issues

2. **Pragmatic factors**
   - Practical, logistical problems
   - Included coverage for teacher planning, librarian reassigned as classroom teacher due to shortages

3. **Strategic factors**
   - Discretionary, to meet school goals
   - Included to improve student performance or improve equity of access to librarians
   - Impacted both adding or cutting a librarian
## Decision Factors Cited by Interviewees

<table>
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<th>Decision Factors</th>
<th>From Administrators who Added Librarians</th>
<th>From Administrators who Reduced or Eliminated All Librarians</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pragmatic</td>
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Most Cited Reasons for Adding Librarians

13 - Change in priorities *(strategic)*
11 - More instruction by librarians *(strategic)*
10 - Equity of student access to librarians *(strategic)*
  
9 - Change in administration *(strategic)*
8 - New funding *(structural)*

Note: The 28 interviewees cited multiple reasons.

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Most Cited Reasons for Cutting Librarians

17 - Budget constraints (structural)
12 - Change in priorities (strategic)
7 - Hired other specialists/Coaches (strategic)
6 - Needed Librarian in Another Position (pragmatic)
6 - Closed School/Enrollment Decreases (structural)
6 - Librarian Deemed Obsolete (strategic)

Note: The 26 interviewees cited multiple reasons.
Prevailing Theme Among All Interviewees

Changes in administration and/or changes in priorities

• Whether librarian positions were increased or decreased

• Suggests that support for school librarians is sometimes based on preconceived beliefs of new/incoming leaders about the value of school libraries and librarians.

• School decision makers want to see value, outcomes, and results from library programs.

• Both groups influenced by previous experiences working with or supervising school librarians, whether positive or negative
Themes – Where Librarian Positions Increased

1. Equity of Access to Librarians
2. New Leadership, New Priorities
3. More Teaching by Librarians
4. Opportunity to Meet Mandates

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Included decisions that reduced, eliminated, combined, or reclassified school librarian positions

1. New Priorities, More Specialists & Teachers

2. Can’t Find a Librarian

3. New Leadership, New Priorities

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Not All About Budget, It’s About Choices

Evidence from the *Perspectives* Report negates that librarian cuts are solely about school budgets

1. Instructional coordinators and administrators increased while librarian decreased.

2. On average, districts that spent the least per student (<$10,000) had better librarian staffing than those spending between $15,000 and $10,000 per student.
Instructional coordinator FTEs have increased by almost 34%.

Librarian FTEs have decreased by 20%.

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<td>2.3%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
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<td>0.5%</td>
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<td>3.7%</td>
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Impact of COVID – Volatile Staffing Patterns

From 2020-21 to 2021-22

- **15.4%** (1,833) of school districts added librarians
- 37% (4,405) of school districts retained librarians
- **15.9%** (1,888) of school districts reduced or eliminated all librarians

**BOTTOM LINE**

31.8% (3,793) school districts had no librarians either year

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Impact of COVID – Volatile Staffing Patterns

Based on 2021-2022 NCES data:

• 35% of all school districts had NO librarians - 7.1 millions students.

• Of those districts with no librarians, 57 percent were majority-minority districts.

• In short, access to school librarians continues to be a major source of educational inequity.

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Interactive Data Tools

Making NCES data more searchable and usable at national, state and district levels.

https://libslide.org/data-tools/

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Example of a District Profile

- District statistics
- Trend line chart of librarian FTEs and other educators
- School Library Impact Research
- SLIDE links
Voices Authors

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    Head Librarian, Boston Latin School

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Voices Interviewers & Coders

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Susan D. Ballard - retired (Director, Library, Media & Technology Services & Past-President, AASL)
Deborah D. Levitov, Ph.D. - retired (School Library Monthly & Teacher Librarian)
Rebecca Morris, Ph.D. - University of Pittsburgh
Mark Ray - Future Ready Librarians

**Intervener:** Christie Kaaland, Ed.D. – Antioch University Seattle

**Coding:** Caitlin Gerrity - Southern Utah University, Deb Kachel & Keith Curry Lance

**Video:** Leah Breevoort

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Special Thanks to SLIDE Advisory Council

- Josh Engel, EdSurge
- April Grace, Ed.D., Shawnee Public Schools, Oklahoma
- Christie Kaaland, Ed.D., Antioch University Seattle
- Kathy Lester, East Middle School, Plymouth, Michigan (AASL President, 2022-23)
- Judi Moreillon, Ph.D., Literacies & Libraries Consultant
- Renee Ousley-Swank, California Department of Education
- Mark Ray, Future Ready Librarians
- Joyce Kasman Valenza, Ph.D., Rutgers University

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Its views, findings, conclusions & recommendations do not necessarily represent those of IMLS.
For More Information

- [https://www.libSLIDE.org](https://www.libSLIDE.org)
  - Publications: major reports, articles, infographics
  - Presentations: ALA, AASL & other conferences
  - Interactive Data Tools (get tables, charts & maps of data you select)

- Contact project leaders
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  - Principal investigator: Keith Curry Lance, RSL Research Group, keithlance@comcast.net