

2025

State of School Libraries in Oregon



OREGON
ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL LIBRARIES

State of School Libraries in Oregon 2025



Oregon Association of School Libraries (OASL)

School library programs in Oregon are in crisis, and the need to address that crisis is more critical than it has ever been. Even as print literacy rates have dropped and the need for information literacy instruction has soared, school library programs across the state have been neglected and diminished. **Reinvesting in these critical programs now** is a crucial move in addressing student literacy, and will benefit students and educators across Oregon in every subject and at every level of student learning.

The Decline of School Library Programs in Oregon

In the 1980-81 school year, when the State Library of Oregon began tracking school library staffing information, there were 818 FTE licensed school librarians serving the students and teachers of Oregon's public schools.¹ By 2023-24, there were 178 FTE licensed school librarians serving our 1272 public schools and over *half a million* students. That is a loss of almost 80% of the licensed school library professionals previously providing critical education in Oregon.



After decades of decline, many school administrators across the state do not have any

Oregon ranks

- **48th in Librarian FTE per school**
- **48th in Students per Librarian FTE**
- **47th in Teacher FTE per Librarian FTE**

experience working with licensed librarians, and do not have any concept of what a strong school library program looks like. Strong school library programs begin with sufficient staffing and consistent and adequate budgets: the **Quality Education Model (QEM)**

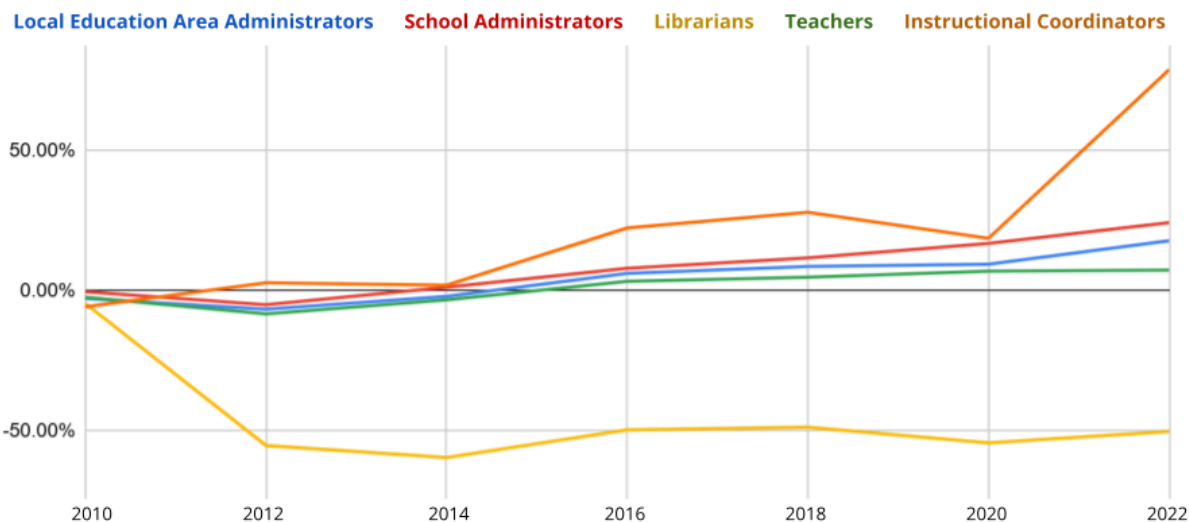
recommends 1 FTE licensed librarian and 1 FTE library support staff² per prototype

¹ State Library of Oregon: [Staffing and Funding in School Libraries](#)

² For an overview of the differing roles of licensed librarian and library support staff, see the [Appendix](#).

school,³ with library budgets of \$28-40 per student — we are currently nowhere even close. In fact, **Oregon ranks almost last across the country in the number of licensed librarians per school and per student.**⁴

In comparison, positions with **no daily student interaction** have increased sharply across the state:⁴



This is not a **sound financial investment** for Oregon schools. School libraries offer a wide range of resources for learners at every level, such as the educational databases provided through the State Library of Oregon,⁵ of which many staff and students in schools without licensed school librarians are completely unaware, and libraries share those resources with transparency and accountability.

Impacts of Strong School Library Programs

There is extensive research⁶ illustrating the impacts that strong school library programs have on student learning. Examples include:

- **Higher standardized test scores in reading, writing, and math**
- **Mastery of academic standards**
- **Increased graduation rates**

³ [Quality Education Model: Identifying Best Practices and Calculating the Cost of a Quality Education](#), August 2024

⁴ [School Library Investigation: Divergence and Evolution, Oregon profile](#)

⁵ [Oregon School Library Information System](#)

⁶ Antioch University Seattle: [School Library Research](#) and Library Research Service: [School Libraries Impact Studies](#)

Researchers from Antioch University point out that there is a consistently positive relationship between full-time licensed librarians and reading and writing scores for students, which “cannot be explained away by student demographics, school funding levels, teacher-pupil ratios, or teacher qualifications,” even after controlling for school and community socioeconomic factors⁷; “in fact, they have often found that the benefits associated with good library programs are strongest for the most vulnerable and at-risk learners, including students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities.”

*The benefits associated with good library programs are strongest for the most vulnerable and at-risk learners, including students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities.*⁶

A national study using National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores illustrated that the loss of licensed librarians in schools was associated with falling reading scores, and the **addition of licensed librarians was associated with increasing scores**.⁸ Additional research suggests that these impacts are long-term and cumulative across all grade levels, and the impacts on writing scores are even greater.⁹ A 2015 Washington state study showed that those positive impacts **included increased math scores**, and that “the one key factor distinguishing high-performing high-poverty schools from low-performing high-poverty schools is a quality library program.”¹⁰

Early Literacy

The importance of early literacy to student success is well understood, which is why Governor Kotek campaigned on and has made a priority of the issue of early literacy, including the launch of an extensive Early Literacy Success Initiative through ODE.¹¹ A key component of early literacy, however, in addition to structured classroom reading instruction, is exposure to a variety of books at multiple reading levels and support for and

⁷ Keith Curry Lance and Debra Kachel, “[Why School Librarians Matter: What Years Of Research Tell Us](#)”

⁸ Lance, K.C. & Hofschire, L. (2011a). “Something To Shout About: New Research Shows That More Librarians Means Higher Reading Scores.” *School Library Journal*, 57 (9), 28-33;

Lance, K.C. & Hofschire, L. (2012). “Change In School Librarian Staffing Linked With Changes In CSAP Reading Performance, 2005 To 2011.” Denver, CO: Library Research Service.

⁹ Lance, K.C. & Schwarz, B. (2012, October). “How Pennsylvania School Libraries Pay Off: Investments In Student Achievement And Academic Standards.” PA School Library Project.

¹⁰ Coker, E. (2015, April). “The Washington State School Library Study: Certified Teacher-Librarians, Library Quality And Student Achievement In Washington State Public Schools.” Seattle, WA: Washington Library Media Association.

¹¹ Oregon Department of Education: [Early Literacy Success Initiative](#)



promotion of independent reading. Oregon’s Early Literacy Framework underscores the importance of school libraries in increasing early literacy rates for Oregon students:¹²

One purpose of school libraries is to provide access to books, with research confirming that access is associated with raising student test scores in all aspects of literacy. Access to culturally relevant and responsive books fosters an early love of learning and a sense of belonging while also positively affecting reading achievement and appears to offset the impact of poverty. This research points to the importance of ensuring that all students, no matter their socioeconomic status, have equitable access to library resources because all aspects of literacy improve when children have access to books. With reliable access to diverse books, students are more likely to read them and to read them for longer periods of time. School libraries can bridge the opportunity gap for students from historically and systemically marginalized communities by providing equal access and resources for learning through culturally relevant and responsive books and instructional materials.

The newly-released 2024 Demographically Adjusted NAEP Scores¹³ show Oregon ranking dead last in 4th grade reading. It is worthwhile to note that Mississippi, which came in highest for 4th grade reading on the adjusted NAEP scores, has 595 students per licensed school librarian, while Oregon has 3455 students for every licensed school librarian in

¹² Oregon Department of Education: [Early Literacy Framework](#)

¹³ Urban Institute, [2024 Demographically Adjusted NAEP Scores](#)

the state.¹⁴ Reinvesting in our school library programs is a strong move toward boosting early literacy rates for Oregon students.

Instruction

Direct library instruction and curriculum support is a critical element of the strong school library program that gets lost when licensed school librarians are not part of the equation. Licensed school librarians design and deliver curriculum aligned to Oregon and national school library and technology learning standards, and support curriculum and content standards in other subjects across the school; they model the use of innovative technologies and instructional strategies, and provide professional development in these areas for other staff members; they teach research skills, information literacy, media and digital literacy, and collaborate with classroom teachers on integrating these skills into curriculum; they teach students to be effective consumers, producers, creators, and presenters of information and ideas, and to be safe, ethical, and responsible digital citizens. All of this crucial instruction is lost when a school is without a licensed school librarian.^{15 16}

Technology

While Oregon was responding to loss of revenue and budget cuts by sacrificing library programs and the educational benefits that come with them, districts in Washington went a different direction and strengthened the connections between school libraries and



educational technology.¹⁷ Mark Ray, an educator from Vancouver, WA, presents nationally on the powerful intersection between libraries and educational technology¹⁸, and the Northwest Council for Computer Education (NCCE) recognizes the importance of this connection in the Teacher-Librarian

Adjusted NAEP Scores: 4th grade reading

Oregon: #50

Mississippi: #1

Rank of Student to Licensed School Librarian ratios

Oregon: #48

Mississippi: #6

¹⁴ School Library Investigation: Divergence and Evolution, [Oregon profile](#) and [Mississippi profile](#)

¹⁵ Oregon Association of School Libraries: [Teacher-Librarian Job Description](#)

¹⁶ [Oregon School Library Standards](#)

¹⁷ [Washington Office of Public Instruction: Librarians](#)

¹⁸ Vancouver Public Schools, [Vancouver Public Schools Technology Director Named Education Tech Leader To Watch](#)

Summit they hold every year at the beginning of their annual educational technology conference.¹⁹ **Washington ranks 15-20 points higher than Oregon** in national comparisons of licensed librarian staffing in schools.²⁰

Many Oregon districts struggle with connecting their educational technology support with individual schools and classrooms; licensed school librarians are the missing element in this equation.²¹ Well-versed in both educational technology and the needs of the classroom, licensed librarians serve as a logical conduit for instruction and professional development in this burgeoning field.

*School librarians have always been at the forefront of technology in our schools.*¹⁶

School Climate and Social-Emotional Learning

School libraries play an important role in fostering a positive school culture by serving as inclusive spaces that support academic success, emotional well-being, and social development.²² Libraries offer a safe, welcoming space where students can explore their interests, seek refuge, and find support during the school day. They can be a space for collaborative learning, with group projects or book clubs fostering teamwork, communication, and empathy. Libraries also provide a space where students can access resources that support their mental health, such as medical information or books on coping strategies.

A well-curated library collection reflects the varied backgrounds and experiences of students, helping them see themselves represented in literature, fostering a sense of belonging, and encouraging independent learning and intellectual curiosity. For many students, school libraries are one of the few places where they have access to the resources they need to succeed, particularly as public libraries may be difficult to reach.



¹⁹ NCCE, [Unleashing the Power of Libraries: NCCE 25's Teacher Librarian Summit](#)

²⁰ [School Library Investigation: Divergence and Evolution. Washington profile](#)

²¹ Amy Burroughs, [Tech-Savvy School Librarians Provide Value to Modern Learners](#)

²² Becky Calzada, [Navigating Challenging Times: The Power of School Libraries and Hope](#)"

State-Level Representation

An important element shared by many states that rank much higher than Oregon in licensed library staffing and early reading scores is a licensed school librarian position at the state department of education. In the Standards & Instructional Support division of the Office of Teaching, Learning & Assessment at the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), there are education specialists for math, science, social studies, language arts, physical education, school counseling, and sexual health, but no education specialist position for library programs. Creating and staffing this position at ODE with a licensed and experienced school librarian would provide expertise in school library program standards, collaboration with other curriculum specialists, and support for classroom teachers and school districts working to restore strong school library programs.

School libraries are more than just rooms filled with books.... learners are encouraged to explore freely, to research independently, and to develop a deeper understanding of the world around them.¹⁷

Conclusion

Education in Oregon faces many challenges at this point in history — literacy, engagement, accessibility, an avalanche of technology and media. Reinvesting in strong school library programs, with library staff teams that include licensed librarians and stable and sufficient budgets, is an action that addresses all of these challenges. Funding and staffing a licensed school librarian education specialist position at ODE would provide a foundation for this reinvestment.

Our work is not just about making sure books are available. It's about ensuring that our learners have the resources they need to learn, to question, and to grow.¹⁷

To learn more, please contact the Oregon Association of School Libraries at president@oasl.olaweb.org.²³

²³ Oregon Association of School Libraries, [Board of Directors](#)

Further Reading

[Investing in School Libraries and Librarians To Improve Literacy Outcomes](#)

Tania Otero Martinez, Center for American Progress, Apr 2024

[Could School Librarians Be The Secret To Increasing Literacy Scores?](#)

Nijma Esad, EveryLibrary Institute, January 2022

[The School Librarian's Role in Reading](#)

American Association of School Libraries, 2020

[A Full-Time School Librarian Makes A Critical Difference In Boosting Student Achievement](#)

Debra E. Kachel and Keith Curry Lance, March 2013

[New Research Shows That More Librarians Means Higher Reading Scores](#)

Keith Curry Lance and Linda Hofschire, School Library Journal, September 2011

[The Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: Exploring the School Library Impact Studies](#)

Video series, 2010

“The mere presence of a librarian is associated with better student outcomes, but what librarians do also has positive effects. Multiple studies have found that test scores tend to be higher in schools where librarians spend more time:

- *Instructing students, both with classroom teachers and independently;*
- *Planning collaboratively with classroom teachers;*
- *Providing professional development to teachers;*
- *Meeting regularly with the principal;*
- *Serving on key school leadership committees;*
- *Facilitating the use of technology by students and teachers;*
- *Providing technology support to teachers, and*
- *Providing reading incentive programs.*

Several library impact studies suggest test scores tend to be higher where administrators, teachers, and librarians themselves think of the school librarian as a school leader; as a teacher, co-teacher, and in-service professional development provider; as a curriculum designer, instructional resources manager, and reading motivator; and as a technology teacher, troubleshooter, and source of instructional support.”⁸

Appendix

Licensed school librarians hold Oregon teaching licenses and have completed additional graduate work that qualifies them for a library media endorsement. Some school librarians hold Master of Library Science degrees; some hold graduate degrees in education or related fields.

<p><i>The role of the licensed school librarian:</i></p> <p>Instruction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design and deliver curriculum aligned to Oregon and national school library and technology learning standards, and which supports the delivery of content standards• Evaluate, promote, and model the use of innovative technologies and instructional strategies• Teach and collaborate on the instruction of research, information literacy, media literacy, and digital literacy• Teach students to be effective consumers, producers, creators, and presenters of information and ideas and to leverage technology in those pursuits• Teach students and school staff to be safe, ethical, and responsible digital citizens• Teach students how to choose appropriate reading materials to meet their needs, interests, and skill levels <p>Literacy Promotion and Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collaborate with teachers and administrators on school and district literacy goals and plans• Promote and maintain a school-wide culture of reading and literature appreciation• Reinforce literacy instruction with resources in a variety of formats and genres including informational texts• Design and facilitate meaningful on-site or virtual experiences to promote a love of reading and lifelong learning, such as Oregon Battle of the Books, Oregon Reader's Choice Awards, literacy fairs, book	<p><i>The role of the classified library assistant:</i></p> <p>Maintenance of and Access to Library Collections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain an organized library collection, which includes processing, inventorying, shelving, and repairing materials and resources in accordance with approved district library policies and procedures• Note: Selecting materials, cataloging, and deselecting materials should be done by or under the supervision of a licensed school librarian.• Circulate library materials, which includes creating overdue notices, preparing reports, managing patron accounts, and finding materials on behalf of patrons• Facilitate access to digital resources such as educational subscriptions, online databases, and e-book collections• Schedule and facilitate the use of library resources and equipment <p>Support for Student Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain order by monitoring and supervising student behavior• Assist with teacher-directed and student-selected learning activities• Guide library patrons in locating and using library materials and related technology• Identify and gather materials requested by the teaching staff to support instruction• Support reading engagement activities, which may include read-alouds, book talks, reading promotion programs, book fairs, and displays
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clubs, etc.

Program Administration

- Champion policy and establish procedures aligned to professional library program standards, best practices, and the needs of the school community
- Create an inviting, respectful, and safe learning environment
- Develop, implement, and promote school library program goals and objectives
- Plan and manage programming and events to support library, school, and district goals
- Develop, maintain, and provide equitable access to a collection of diverse informational and recreational resources in multiple formats
- Develop and administer a library budget aligned to library, school, and district goals and objectives
- Train and direct library support staff; participate in hiring decisions
- Recruit, train, and supervise student assistants and community volunteers

Leadership

- Advocate for the school library program and its role in the instructional program
- Lead professional development to support the integration of information and digital literacies, the use of technology, and collaboration across the curriculum
- Model innovative strategies and technologies to support classroom teachers in their instructional practice
- Share trends and emerging research related to education and technology
- Champion and advise on core library tenets and related issues, including equity, diversity, and inclusion; intellectual freedom and the right to read; access; confidentiality of records; and copyright and ethical use of information
- Engage as a leader and learner on school, district, state, and national committees and professional organizations

Additional Responsibilities

- Follow policies and procedures, including those that apply to the library
- Become familiar with core tenets of librarianship to include intellectual freedom
- Maintain organized and thorough library records
- Maintain confidentiality regarding student and staff records and transactions
- Communicate clearly and appropriately with students, school staff, parents, and community
- Train and direct the work of volunteers and student assistants in the library



To share this report or access the live links, go to:

<https://bit.ly/2025schlib-Oregon>

Photo Credit

All photos by Diane Beals (*Instagram @diane_beals2*), taken on site at Buckman Elementary, Sellwood Middle School, Bridger Creative Science School, and McDaniel High School in Portland Public Schools, which have all been impacted by significant library program cuts made in the 2024-25 school year.