

## Why Doesn't Every APS School Have a Teacher-Librarian?

Tracy Nichols, Teacher-Librarian, Albuquerque Teachers Federation

### Question:

In what ways do classroom teachers value a Full-Time Teacher Librarian at their school?

### Context:

I think there should be a full-time teacher-librarian in every school in APS, but current APS policy is only schools with 500+ students qualify for a full-time teacher-librarian. I am a full-time teacher-librarian; I see all of the my 500+ students every week in library class, and the library is available for teachers and students to check out books every day of the week. When the librarian is not FT, students may only see the librarian once every other week. Or they may have library class every week, but the librarian may be pulled to a second school for 2.5 days each week, leaving the library inaccessible half the week. When the librarian is PT, students will only see their librarian 15 times a year. The librarian then has less time to establish rapport with students, which makes it harder for the librarian to provide personalized guidance in expanding students' unique reading habits and addressing their personal learning needs, all things full-time teacher-librarians strive to do. When the library is not open every day for every student and teacher, the result is less access and greater inequity across the district. I'd like to see the policy changed to allow for more, if not all, schools in APS to have a full-time teacher-librarian by eliminating the student floor threshold of 500 students and by mandating librarians be certified teachers and not Educational Assistants, or EAs.

### Literature Review:

Thirty years of research overwhelmingly shows that students have greater success when the school has a library that is well-funded and fully staffed. Since the 2008 recession and the budget cuts that followed, large numbers of states and school districts across the country chose to eliminate librarians, disproportionately at the elementary level. However, states that gained librarians between 2008-2009 "showed significantly greater improvements in fourth-grade reading scores than states that lost librarians." (School Library Journal 2011).

School impact studies from around the US demonstrate the positive impact that libraries have on student outcomes. "Regardless of how rich or poor a community is, students tend to perform better on reading tests where and when their library programs are in the hands of endorsed librarians". (Phi Delta Kappan 2014). Back in 2002 the report *How School Libraries Improve Outcomes for Children: The New Mexico Study* stated "the impact of school library development on academic achievement" could not be explained away by **school differences** (% of teachers with master's degrees, teachers' experience, the teacher/pupil ratio) or by **community differences** (% living in poverty or belonging to minority groups, the % of adults graduated from high school).

What's striking is the research coincides with recent findings in the *Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico* lawsuit. This lawsuit found indigenous, Hispanic and special education students were more negatively impacted by the underfunding of schools in New Mexico than other students. The library research also shows those subsets of students are more significantly affected when a full-time teacher-librarian is NOT in the school. "At schools where library programs gain or maintain an endorsed librarian when school budgets get tight, students tend to excel. At schools where library programs lose or never had an endorsed librarian, students suffer as a result" (Lance & Hofschire, 2012).

### Survey:

I decided the voices of educators could be persuasive in explaining why full-time teacher-librarians are vital to the success of educators, and by extension, the school and its students. I surveyed educators at schools both in and out of APS. Using a Google form, respondents identified if they currently have a full-time teacher-librarian, part-time teacher-librarian or an EA serving as their librarian. I also asked educators to rate how much they value the typical services that a librarian provides. Typical services include: suggest or locate instructional materials for teachers or for students, provide social/emotional support for teachers or for students, team teach or provide direct instruction for students, provide extensions that relate to classroom instruction, and provide professional development and collaboration for educators. Respondents rated the value of these services on a 5-point Likert Scale; 5 being services *essential to the educator* and 1 being *not at all essential to the educator*.

### Results:

Seventy-five (75) people responded to the survey. The majority of respondents (76%) have a full-time teacher-librarian with 21% having a PT TL, and 3% having an EA. Question one asked “How important to you is having a full-time teacher-librarian at your school?” Ninety-five (95%) considered a full-time teacher-librarian essential to their work. For every subsequent question, respondents overwhelmingly stated that each of the typical services were considered *essential*, as shown below:

Suggest or locate materials for me	(73%)
Suggest or locate materials for my students	(85%)
Provide social/emotional support for me	(65%)
Provide social/emotional support or my students	(89%)
Provide PD or collaboration for me	(71%)
Team teach or provide direct instruction for students	(73%)
Provide extensions for my students	(77%)

When looking at responses where educators rated the services as a 3, 2 or 1 (1 being “not at all essential”), those low responses happened at a higher frequency when the librarian was an EA. Of all the responses given with an EA as the librarian, 25% of the responses were a 3, 2, or 1. When the librarian is full-time or part-time, only 5%-8% of the responses were a 3, 2, or 1. This reinforces the idea that educators get much more value from their library when it is staffed with a certified teacher-librarian. Anecdotally, one respondent added in the survey notes, “Teachers and students do not have the support they need from a librarian. The EA cannot provide what is needed.”

As another respondent put it, “(Our librarian is) a valuable resource for me as a new teacher.” Another respondent stated, “If I’m teaching a lesson, it is then backed up during library time. If we are working on certain projects, our librarian is able to help students pick out the appropriate materials. Seriously, I couldn’t function without our librarian!”

### Suggestions:

When educators responded to my survey with sentiments like “There are times that the students want to visit the library and the library is closed,” and “We are a Title I school and our families need more resources, not less,” it made me wonder how much it would cost the district to fund at least one full-time teacher-librarian at every school.

Staffing is always the largest part of the budget, but when years of research has proven that students do better with a well-funded and fully staffed library, it’s hard to ignore. Especially when it’s not just of benefit to our students’ test scores. Studies show that school culture is a large reason why educators stay or leave the profession. Educators have many responsibilities, and a full-time teacher-librarian helps manage that. “As a teacher of all content areas, I find it difficult to be well

versed in children's literature. It is ESSENTIAL for me to have a knowledgeable human resource I can send my students to for guidance...when it comes to their reading journey. When this human is also an experienced classroom teacher, I know that my students are getting...meaningful lessons... to support content instruction in the classroom. We (the librarian and I) are able to collaborate and understand each other on a different level which also benefits my students.”

APS policy makers need to seriously consider three things (1) the research, (2) *Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico* lawsuit (3) staffing. Research shows the positive outcomes reaped by funding a full-time teacher-librarian. The *Yazzie-Martinez* lawsuit requires the state, and by extension our district, to fully fund and staff our schools so that we avoid disproportionately hurting minority students. O Title I educator stated, “Children need more time in the library surrounded by books! A full-time teacher-librarian would bring more exposure (to) books, research, technology, and all library resources for our students and their families. It actually baffles me how all schools do not have full-time librarians.” After years of austerity funding, attracting and maintaining quality educators will continue to be difficult. Quotes from my respondents show that a full-time teacher-librarian contributes to a positive culture for the staff, which in turn helps schools get and keep good teachers.

So, we know what’s good for kids. We know what the law requires. And my survey results show what educators want. The 500-student threshold in APS needs to be lowered or eliminated. Further, a ceiling threshold should be added to fund more library staff at our larger schools. I personally see 500 students a week at an elementary school, and this is manageable most of the time. However, there are schools with one full-time teacher-librarian and 800+ students. At some point, this creates the same situation as having a PT TL. Students have fewer regular visits and less access to the library. At what point can a full-time teacher-librarian offer unique suggestions to individual students when there are 800 students to know? And if the full-time teacher-librarian is teaching all day, there is no time for providing those services to educators that they clearly need and value.

## Literature Review

*Something to Shout About: Research that shows more librarians means higher reading scores.* School Library Journal. (Sep 1, 2011) Keith Curry Lance and Linda Hofschire.

<https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=something-to-shout-about-new-research-shows-that-more-librarians-means-higher-reading-scores>

*Measuring and Assessing SEL & Schools Climate to Support Student Success in New Mexico.* (Nov. 14, 2018). Jennifer DePaoli.

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/ALESC%20111418%20Item%202%20.2%20-%20Learning%20Policy%20Institute-State%20SELClimate%20Presentation.pdf>

*Why school librarians matter: What years of research tell us.* Phi Delta Kappan. (Mar 26, 2018). Keith Curry Lance and Debra E. Kachel.

<https://kappanonline.org/lance-kachel-school-librarians-matter-years-research/>

*The biggest classroom in the building.* Phi Delta Kappan. (Mar 30, 2014). Tricia Kuon, Juanita Flores and Janie Pickett.

<https://kappanonline.org/school-librarians-biggest-classroom-common-core-kuon-flores-pickett/>

*Change in school librarian staffing linked with change in CSAP reading performance, 2005-2011.* Denver, CO: Colorado State Library, Library Research Service. (2021) Keith Curry Lance and Hofschire, L.

<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED572250.pdf>

*School Libraries and Student Achievement.* (2013) Library Research Service

[https://www.lrs.org/documents/school/school\\_library\\_impact.pdf?lrspdfmetric=no](https://www.lrs.org/documents/school/school_library_impact.pdf?lrspdfmetric=no)

American Library Association & National Center for Education Statistics.

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/school-libraries>

## Appendix

Survey - (google form) <https://forms.gle/am3cjrwonCN3B6Cd9>

### Survey Questions

1. Which statement describes your school's librarian: (full-time, part-time, EA, none)
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, how important to you is having a full-time teacher-librarian at your school? (5 = essential, 1 = not at all essential)

The following are typical functions of a full-time Teacher-Librarian. On a scale of 1 to 5, how important are these services to you as a teacher.

3. Suggest or locate instructional materials for me
4. Suggest or locate materials for my students' academic or personal use
5. Provide support for me through informal/formal professional development & collaboration
6. Provide social or emotional support for me
7. Provide social or emotional support for my students
8. Team teach or provide direct instruction for my students
9. Provide extensions for my students that connect to my classroom instruction

Please add any additional comments regarding your experiences of having or not having a full-time teacher-librarian at your school. Thank you.

### Results

How important to you is having a librarian...	that is full time @ your school?	to suggest or locate materials for you	to suggest or locate materials for your students	to provide you PD & to collaborate with
Scale 5 to 1				
Essential (5)	95%	73%	85%	71%
Somewhat Essential (4)	5%	23%	14%	22%
Not at All Essential (3 or 1)	0%	4%	1%	7%

How Important to you is having a librarian...	to provide you social/ emotional support	to provide your students social/ emotional support	to team teach or provide direct instruction for your students	Provide extensions for your students
Scale 5 to 1				
Essential (5)	65%	89%	73%	77%
Somewhat Essential (4)	19%	10%	12%	17%
Not at All Essential (3 or 1)	16%	1%	15%	6%