OELMA

Ohio Educational Library Media Association

Student Learning Through Ohio School Libraries

A Summary of the Ohio Research Study

Presented to the Ohio Educational Library Media Association
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http://www.oelma.org/studentlearning.htm

Table of Contents

This brief summary provides an overview of the background, key findings, and recommendations of the *Student Learning through Ohio School Libraries* research study undertaken from October, 2002 through December, 2003. This study of 39 effective school libraries across Ohio involved 13,123 students in Grades 3 to 12 and 879 faculty. The research study sought to understand **how students benefit from school libraries** through elaborating "conceptions of help" (the nature and extent of "help" provided by the school library in relation to student learning) and providing some measure of the extent of these "helps," as perceived by students and faculty.

Background of the Study

The research study *Student Learning through Ohio School Libraries* was funded by the State Library of Ohio through a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to the Ohio Educational Library Media Association (OELMA). It was coordinated through Leadership for School Libraries (L4SL), a coalition of OELMA, INFOhio (the state K-12 network), the Ohio Department of Education and The State Library of Ohio. The research was undertaken by Dr. Ross J. Todd and Dr. Carol C. Kuhlthau of Rutgers University and the Center for International Scholarship in School Libraries (CISSL). This research study has its foundation in 50 years of research that has sought to understand the impact of school libraries on student achievement. It builds on the considerable research undertaken by Dr. Keith Curry Lance and colleagues involving 3,000 schools with school libraries serving over three million students. These studies show that school library predictors of academic achievement, as measured by standardized test scores, include: credentialed staff and support staff engaged in a curriculum-centered library program; school librarians' involvement in collaborative information literacy instruction; provision of high quality collections and an information technology infrastructure for information access and use; and motivating students to read. Prior to this research study, there have been no state-wide studies which examine the multi-dimensional dynamics of student learning through effective school libraries, and specifically from the perspective of students. Such a study was seen as timely for Ohio, particularly with increasing focus on standards-based education, accountability, performance excellence and school improvement.

Research Focus

On the basis of how students benefit from effective school libraries, this study sought to provide recommendations for professional practice, educational policy development, further research, and tools for school librarians to chart their libraries' impacts on learning. The project team also sought to focus on evidence-based practice by providing statewide data on best practices and promising practices in school librarianship that could serve as a basis for dialogue, continuous improvement and professional development across Ohio.

Research Methodology

Thirty-nine schools across Ohio were selected on the basis of providing an effective school library program with a credentialed school librarian. The criteria for selection were based on the Ohio Guidelines for Effective School Library Media Programs and validated by a distinguished International Advisory Panel. Employing a judgment sampling process, an Ohio Experts Panel made the selection

of participating schools following a widely advertised nominations process.

Two web-based survey instruments were used to collect data. The *Impacts on Learning Survey* was available for grade 3 to grade 12 students to identify how the library has "helped" them with their learning. It consisted of a Likert response to 48 statements of "helps" as listed in Table 1. The survey instrument also provided an open-ended critical incident question to enable students to articulate, if possible, specific instances of "helps" in their own voice. The open-ended critical incident question also identified additional "conceptions of help" not specified in the 48 statements. The *Perceptions of Learning Impacts Survey* was made available to faculty in the selected schools. This survey used the same 48 statements provided to the students, with a change in "person." It also provided an open-ended question that sought to identify the evidence faculty used to make the claims about how they perceived the school library has helped their students. The two surveys provided an opportunity to triangulate multiple sources of data in an endeavor to build a coherent picture of the nature and extent of "helps" provided by the school library in relation to student learning.

Student Profile
The findings and conclusions were based on a quantitative data set of 13,123 valid student responses, and 10,315 qualitative responses from these students.

Gender – 6,294 boys (48%) and 6,702 girls (51.1%) participated in the study. 127 respondents did not signify their gender.

Age – The age of students ranged from age 7 to age 20 with an average age of 14.2 years. Most were 12 to 18 years of age.

Grade levels – Grades 9, 11 and 12 provided the highest number of respondents and grades 3, 4, and 5 provided the lowest number.

Ethnic background – The students were primarily White (78.5%), with smaller groups of African Americans (5.5%) and Mixed Race (4.1%).

Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card – 62% of the students came from school districts with a Report Card Performance Category of "Excellent," 22.9% from "Effective" school districts, 12.8% from "Continuous Improvement" school districts, and 2.3% from "Academic Watch" school districts. All school libraries across these report card categories were deemed to be effective as determined by the validation criteria. (At the time of the study, report card ratings were assigned at the district level. Individual schools in a district could exceed the rating.)

Ohio Department of Education Type of School – 80.9% of students came from urban/suburban districts. 9.8% of students came from rural areas, 7% from small cities, and 2.3% from large cities.

Some Key Findings
The 48 statements were grouped conceptually in seven blocks as shown in Table 1. **Statistically 99.44% of the sample (13,050 students) indicated that the school library and its services, including roles of school librarians, have helped them in some way, regardless of how much, with their learning as it relates to the 48 statements.** Only 73 students indicated that none of the 48 statements applied to them. 25.54% of the sample (3,352 students) said that the library has helped them, regardless of how much, with their learning on all 48 statements. This would indicate that the school library plays a major role in helping students with their learning. The library is clearly and unequivocally helpful to students in Ohio, and several student comments even questioned why this research was being done: *I'm in grade 8. I don't get it. Why do I need to do this survey? Isn't it obvious to everyone that we have to have our school library to do all our school work. It's impossible to do it without it, that's for sure.*

Table 1

Survey Questions by Blocks	Percentage of Responses				
Block 1. How helpful the school library is with getting information you need.	Most helpful	Quite helpful	Some help	A Little help	Does not apply
11. The school library has helped me know the different steps in finding and using information.	25.7	38.7	22.3	10.1	3.2
12. The information in the school library has helped me work out the questions for the topics I am working on.	27.2	37.5	21.3	9.9	4.1
13. The school library has helped me find different sources of information (such as books, magazines, CDs, websites, videos) for my topics.	34.0	30.2	19.3	11.6	4.9
14. The school library has helped me know when I find good information.	19.9	29.1	26.0	17.9	7.2
15. The school library has helped me find different opinions about my topics.	19.2	28.8	25.8	17.2	9.1
16. The school library has helped me feel better about finding information.	21.9	28.2	23.2	17.4	9.4
17. The school library has helped me feel good about asking for assistance when I go there.	28.8	25.2	18.8	17.9	9.3

Table 1 (continued)

Block 2. How helpful the school library is with using the information to complete your school work.	Most helpful	Quite helpful	Some help	A Little help	Does not apply
21. The school library has helped me know how to use the different kinds of information sources (such as books, magazine, CDs, websites, videos).	31.5	30.4	19.5	12.4	6.3
22. The school library has helped me work out the main ideas in the information I find.	17.7	31.9	25.6	16.9	7.9
23. The school library has helped me get better at taking notes.	12.8	16.6	20.7	27.8	22.1
24. The school library has helped me put all the ideas together for my topics.	14.7	23.9	24.9	23.1	13.4
25. The school library has helped me put ideas in my own words.	13.4	20.2	22.5	26.0	17.9
26. The school library has helped me think about how I should go about finding information next time.	24.9	29.7	22.5	15.4	7.6
27. The school library has helped me know that research takes a lot of work.	32.3	25.9	18.5	14.3	9.0
28. The information I have found in the school library has helped me become more interested in my topics.	23.1	25.6	22.1	18.4	10.8

Block 3. How helpful the school library is with your school work in general.	Most helpful	Quite helpful	Some help	A Little help	Does not apply
31. The school library has helped me remember my school work.	11.7	18.8	19.0	22.9	27.6
32. Two of the classes where I have remembered more school work are:					
33. The school library has helped me get the first facts about my topics.	23.4	30.3	22.1	16.3	7.9
34. The school library has helped me learn more facts about my topics.	31.3	31.4	19.8	11.7	5.7
35. The school library has helped me when I do not understand some things.	21.5	26.9	23.8	17.8	10.0
36. The school library has helped me figure out if my own ideas are good or bad.	12.5	20.9	23.1	23.9	19.6
37. The school library has helped me change my mind about some things I thought I knew.	17.2	23.6	23.5	20.5	15.1
38. The school library has helped me figure out my own opinions on things.	15.1	21.5	22.3	22.5	18.6
39. The school library has helped me connect different ideas I already have.	16.5	24.3	24.0	20.4	14.8
3A. The school library has helped me talk more in class discussions.	13.4	15.5	17.8	26.5	26.9

Block 4. How helpful the school library is with using computers in the library, at school, and at home.	Most helpful	Quite helpful	Some help	A Little help	Does not apply
41. Computers in the school library have helped me do my school work better.	41.6	24.0	14.3	12.5	7.6
42. The school library has gotten me more interested in computers.	24.9	20.5	18.2	20.2	16.1
43. Computers have helped me find information inside and outside of the school library.	49.0	21.4	13.8	10.1	5.7
44. The school library has helped me search the Internet better.	33.2	23.0	16.9	16.5	10.4
45. The school library has helped me be more careful about information I find on the Internet.	24.8	22.7	18.9	19.2	14.3
46. Computer programs (like PowerPoint, Word, and Excel) in the school library help me do my school work.	39.7	20.8	14.3	12.7	12.5
47. The school library has helped me feel better about using computers to do my school work.	29.5	22.3	17.0	17.0	14.2

Block 5. How helpful the school library is to you with your general reading interests.	Most helpful	Quite helpful	Some help	A Little help	Does not apply
51. The school library has helped me find stories I like.	29.3	19.4	17.2	18.7	15.5
52. The school library has helped me read more.	20.9	17.0	17.2	24.3	20.6
53. The school library has helped me get better at reading.	18.2	15.2	15.8	25.2	25.6
54. The school library has helped me enjoy reading more.	20.9	14.0	16.3	25.5	23.3
55. The school library has helped me be a better writer.	15.5	16.9	17.9	24.7	25.1

Block 6. How helpful the school library is to you when you are not at school.					
61. The school library has helped me discover interesting topics other than my school work.	22.6	21.4	17.1	17.6	21.3
62. Some of these topics are …					
63. The things I've learned in the school library help me study at home.	16.6	21.7	21.4	22.8	17.5
64. The school library has helped me get more organized with my homework.	12.4	17.7	19.5	25.1	25.3
65. The school library has helped me find information even when I am not at school.	19.3	18.4	17.6	21.8	22.8
66. The school library lessons have helped me solve problems better.	13.3	17.4	20.2	24.5	24.6
67. The school library has helped me when I have a personal concern or issue.	10.2	12.1	13.8	24.4	39.6
68. Information in the school library has helped me decide what I need to do next with my school work.	15.7	17.8	20.6	24.1	21.8

Table 1 (continued)

Block 7. Now, some general things (ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT)	Most helpful	Quite helpful	Some help	A Little help	Does not apply
71. The school library has helped me do my school work better.	21.5	21.7	21.1	20.4	15.3
72. The school library has helped me get better grades on my projects and assignments.	26.1	26.4	19.5	16.5	11.5
73. The school library has helped me get better grades on tests and quizzes.	13.5	17.2	20.0	24.8	24.6
74. The school library has helped me think harder about my school work.	14.8	18.0	20.0	24.7	22.6
75. The school library has helped me feel more confident about doing my school work.	17.3	17.7	18.4	23.2	23.4

Further "Conceptions of Help"

The 10,315 qualitative responses, where students responded to the open-ended question, provided high numbers of concrete examples of how the school library "helps" students with their learning for most of the 48 statements. Nine additional "help" constructs emerged from the students' comments. These are:

1. The school library saves me time with doing my school work.

2. The school library enables me to complete my work on time.

3. The school library helps me by providing a study environment for me to work.

4. The school library helps me take stress out of learning.

5. The school library helps me know my strengths and weaknesses with information use.

6. The school library helps me think about the world around me.

7. The school library helps me do my work more efficiently.

8. The school library provides me with a safe environment for ideas investigation.

9. The library helps me set my goals and plan for things.

Other Important Patterns in the Data

The study notes there is no significant difference between boys and girls in relation to how helpful the school library is to them while learning away from school, and in relation to general aspects of academic achievement. Girls consider school libraries more helpful than boys in terms of: getting information they need; using the information to complete their school work; using computers; and in relation to general reading interests. African American students find the school library to be significantly more helpful than other students in relation to reading development and interests, when they are learning away from school, and in terms of the overall perceptions of achievement.

The "helps" of the school library are strongest in the elementary school, with a decrease shown in levels of "help" as students progress through schooling. The school library is clearly an important place for elementary students to develop a range of information competencies, and provides them with multiple opportunities to learn with information. This is not to say that students in upper grades do not need school libraries or the instructional interventions of school librarians. Quantitative data show that students in middle and high schools are helped substantially by the school library. Student comments indicate possible reasons for this decrease, particularly student mastery of a range of information skills which enable them to work independently and to transfer appropriate skills to new tasks, and to apply these acquired/learned skills to locate information beyond the library.

The scores of students in Continuous Improvement schools and Effective schools are higher (in some cases significantly higher) than Academic Watch and Excellent schools. School libraries appear to play a role in enabling schools to reach performance excellence standards. The scores of students in small city schools are significantly higher than other types of schools. The mean scores for rural schools in relation to the provision of information technology are significantly higher than schools in Urban/Suburban areas. Rural schools clearly value the help provided by school libraries in relation to access to information technology through the school library, as well as the instructional intervention in the development of technological literacy.

School Library as *Dynamic Agent of Learning*

Overall, the research provides a multi-dimensional perspective of the nature of school library "helps" with a strong consistency of findings from diverse data sources. **Collectively the data show that effective school libraries in Ohio are dynamic rather than passive agents of learning***. The ranked mean scores of each block (see Table 2) indicate that the effective school library helps the strongest as a *resource agent* and a *technical agent***, providing access to information resources necessary for students to complete their research assignments and projects successfully. The scores also indicate the effective

school library provides access to both print collections within the library and electronic resources through databases and the World Wide Web. However, the qualitative responses show that the school library's strength is not just as a passive information supply and exchange agency. **Clearly helpful is the library's part in engaging students in an active process of building their own understanding and knowledge** — the library as an *agent for individualized learning, knowledge construction and academic achievement*. The constructive "helps" include the ability to:

- conduct research effectively;
- identify key ideas;
- analyze, synthesize and evaluate information; and
- develop personal conclusions.

These are developed through instructional intervention which appears to be highly valued by the students: systematic, explicit and contextualized instruction at class, group and individual levels centering on information literacy competencies. Through effective school libraries, students understand what good research is about, how to undertake good research, and know that doing good research, with effort and hard work, will result in academic success.

Ranked highest by the students, the effective school library's role in information technology goes well beyond that of information access. The provision of up-to-date software for the manipulation and presentation of information enables students to create representations of their newly acquired knowledge. **Correspondingly, the instructional intervention by the school librarian goes beyond teaching students how to use technology tools to access and evaluate information, but also provides instruction in how to use these tools effectively and reflectively to create products.** Students also value the library as a *rescue agent* in dealing with a myriad of technical problems in the information-to-knowledge tasks and enabling the development of technical problem-solving competencies.

General academic achievement dimensions, reading and independent learning were some of the lower scores. This is not to say that the school library does not help students here — the findings suggest that they do a noteworthy job, but that other aspects are seen as more helpful than these. While reading was ranked comparatively low in terms of helpfulness, effective school libraries in Ohio do play a role as an *agent of independent reading and personal development*. This role is clearly stronger at the lower grade levels than at the higher levels, however, students' comments across all grades identify the "help" of the library in engaging them in independent reading for the love of it, and they identified 3,952 different topics that the library has helped them explore. Reading materials targeted beyond informational curriculum needs — personal pursuits, pleasure/leisure reading, and reading for becoming citizens of a democratic world are accessed by students, and they appear to value planned approaches to promoting and encouraging reading for life-long learning. The lower overall scores for reading and the student comments reflect that some students do not view the primary role of the school library as supporting their leisure activities or personal pursuits. Whereas, they clearly view the school library as supporting their information and curriculum needs. There is some indication that students are so busy with completing research imposed on them for their curriculum requirements that they actually have little time to engage in more pleasurable reading pursuits. It may be that independent reading is a casualty of intensely academic and test-oriented schooling.

The comparison of student and faculty data (see Table 2) shows that the average responses from the faculty are even more positive than those from the students in all of the blocks.

Table 2

Blocks (From Table 1- Survey Questions)		Student Mean	Rank of Means	Faculty Mean	Rank of Means
Block 1:	Find and locate information	2.5354	1	3.210	2
Block 2:	Use information to complete school work	2.2508	3	2.7420	3
Block 3:	School work in general	2.0701	4	2.5080	6
Block 4:	Using computers in the school library, at school, and at home	2.5293	2	3.3081	1
Block 5:	General reading interests	1.9069	6	2.6553	4
Block 6:	Outside school	1.7723	7	2.3119	7
Block 7:	Some general reactions (academic achievement)	1.9656	5	2.5283	5

The top three conceptual groups perceived to be helpful to the students are also the top three perceived by the faculty to be helpful to the students, with a variation in terms of Block 1, finding and using information, which is ranked higher by the students, and Block 4, using computers in the school library, which is ranked higher by the faculty. Block 6 and Block 7 are similarly ranked by faculty and students as the lowest rankings. The most important differences are with Block 3, school work in general. Students' rankings here are higher than the faculty, perhaps an indication of the teaching faculty's role in teaching content; and Block 5, where the faculty's expectations of the school library's role in terms of reading development are higher than the level of "helps" observed by students.

For students in this large sample, effective school libraries clearly help students with their learning in multiple and diverse ways, and to no small extent. **The study shows that an effective school library, lead by a credentialed school librarian who has a clearly defined role in information-centered pedagogy, plays a critical role in facilitating student learning for building knowledge.** Students value the role of a school librarian as an information-learning specialist, and the personal engagement with students at class, group and individual levels to initiate and enable the "helps" is a critical component of an effective school library. This instructional intervention role, centering on the development of information literacy, affords Ohio students significant opportunities to learn and to succeed with their research. **What this conveys is the notion of an effective school library in Ohio as not just an *information place*, but also as a *knowledge space* where students develop the appropriate information literacy scaffolds to enable them to engage with information and build new knowledge. An effective school library is not just *informational*, but *formational*.**

Recommendations and Implications

The successes of the school libraries in this study show what can be focused on and improved in any school, and they provide useful benchmarks for measuring improvement. The study identifies some essential *informational*, *transformational* and *formational* building blocks for effective school libraries in Ohio's schools to play a leading role as *dynamic agents of learning*. (see Table 3) These building blocks are not to be perceived as independent blocks; rather, as elements that work together in integrated and iterative ways to enable students to be active creators and users of their own knowledge.

These students exhibit/demonstrate:

— high levels of reading literacy

— ability to define problems, frame questions, explore ideas, formulate focus, investigate, analyze and synthesize ideas to create their own views, evaluate solutions and reflect on new understandings

— proficiency in the use of technology and information tools to create information products that accurately represent their newly developed understanding

— effective communication of ideas by using oral, written, visual and technological modes of expression – individually or in teams

— ethical, responsible use of information, a concern for quality information and a value for different modes of thought.

These key building blocks are:

Resources: Current, multi-perspective, multi-format resources with readability levels aligned with the local curriculum, and supporting Ohio's academic content standards.

Technological infrastructure: State-of-the-art technology to acquire, organize, create, and disseminate information, and function as a gateway to information.
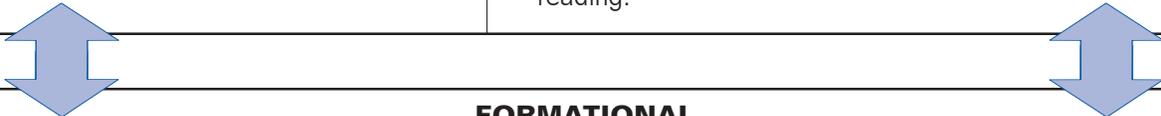
Reading resources: Reading materials targeted beyond informational curriculum needs – personal pursuits, pleasure/leisure reading, and the development of thinking and informed citizens of the USA and the world.

Information literacy: Development of information literacy for engagement with information in all its forms in the context of curriculum needs, content standards and subject knowledge creation processes for effective engagement and utilization of information.

Technological literacies: Development of media and technological skills, which include critical thinking and communication competencies; as well as the appropriate and ethical use of technology for information access, retrieval, production, and dissemination.

Reading engagement: Development of approaches to promote and encourage reading for academic achievement and life-long learning through participation in reading initiatives; promotion of literature; reinforcement of reading skills and fostering a sustained love of reading.

Table 3

The Ohio School Library as a Dynamic Agent of Learning **ESSENTIAL LEARNING FOUNDATIONS**	
INFORMATIONAL **The Resource Base**	**TRANSFORMATIONAL** **Learning-Teaching Intervention**
Resources: Current, multi-perspective, multi-format resources with readability levels aligned with the local curriculum, and supporting Ohio's academic content standards. **Technological infrastructure:** State-of-art technology to acquire, organize, produce, and disseminate information, and function as a gateway to information. **Reading resources:** Reading materials targeted beyond informational curriculum needs – personal pursuits, pleasure/leisure reading.	**Information literacy:** Development of information literacy for engagement with information in all its forms in the context of curriculum needs, content strands and subject knowledge creation processes for effective engagement and utilization of information. **Technological literacies:** Development of media and technological skills, which include critical thinking skills and communication competencies; as well as the appropriate and ethical use of technology for information access, retrieval, production, and dissemination via electronic resources, networks, and the Internet. **Reading engagement:** Development of approaches to promote and encourage reading for academic achievement and life-long learning through participation in national and state reading celebrations and initiatives; reading to students, promoting literature, reinforcing reading skills, and encouraging independent reading for personal enjoyment; engaging in a range of activities to foster sustained love of reading.

FORMATIONAL
Student Expectations and Achievement

Knowledge creation: Students achieve through being able to define problems, frame questions, explore ideas, formulate focus, investigate, analyze and synthesize ideas to create own views, evaluate solutions and reflect on new understandings.

Knowledge use: Students develop transferable skills for sustaining knowledge creation beyond the classroom.

Knowledge production: Students can use technology and information tools to produce new knowledge and demonstrate achievement. They create information products that accurately represent their newly developed understanding.

Knowledge dissemination: Students can communicate ideas using oral, written, visual and technological modes of expression – individually or in teams.

Knowledge values: Students are ethical, responsible users of information who accept responsibility for personal decisions and information actions. They demonstrate concern for quality information and value different modes of thought.

Reading literacy: Students have high levels of reading literacy. They become independent, life-long sustained readers.

As a result of the Ohio research study, it is recommended that:

— *all school library programs provide instructional intervention, through a credentialed school librarian, which centers on the development of information literacy skills for inquiry learning*
— *all school libraries, including elementary schools, be staffed with credentialed school librarians who have educational certification and who engage in collaborative instructional initiatives to help students learn and achieve*
— *all school librarians have a clearly defined role as information-learning specialist, with expertise*
  • as an instructional designer who creates and delivers information literacy instruction at class, group and individual levels;
  • as an educational partner-leader who mutually collaborates, negotiates, and plans with school administrators, teachers, students and parents to implement information literacy instruction in the curriculum;
  • as a school library program administrator who mutually negotiates, plans and implements a whole-school library program which articulates the integration of information, transformations and formation, as well as the managerial and organizational dimensions of the role; and
  • as a partner-leader in the provision of learning-oriented professional development targeted to whole-school success of learning goals.
— *all school libraries provide a learning-centered space supported by a strong technology infrastructure*
— *all stakeholders engage in sustained and action-oriented discussions in the context of continuous improvement of the necessary resources, technology and staffing require-ments needed to maximize the learning opportunities through school libraries.*

Recommendations for OELMA

To enable all local schools to improve in the goal of providing effective school libraries, this study recommends that the Ohio Educational Library Media Association take a strong leadership role in providing professional development to ensure all school librarians reach performance standards. OELMA is now in a unique position to take hold of a prized opportunity for student-learning centered leadership, one that might have as its central theme to the profession: "we can help you get here." This leadership role must enable school librarians to critically audit and evaluate their school libraries and to engage in professional benchmarking, and empowering all school librarians to engage in learning initiatives.

A Final Reflection

In reflecting on the results of this study, it is appropriate to ask some questions. What happens to students in Ohio if all the "helps" identified are not available to them through the provision of effective school libraries? What happens if all of the information infrastructure, resources, information technology, informational and instructional expertise of the school librarian are taken away, or reduced? And in light of the clear role of these school libraries as "dynamic agents of learning," it is also appropriate to ask: What would happen if all school libraries across Ohio had appropriate resource and technological infrastructures, and were staffed with professional school librarians who actively created their school libraries as dynamic agencies of learning?

The answers to these questions center firmly around the provision or absence of concrete opportunities for students to learn in a rich, complex and diverse information environment and reach higher levels of achievement.

> **In Ohio, the provision of opportunities to learn through effective school libraries is critical to ensure that no student is left behind.**

The findings echo the words of First Lady Laura Bush: "School libraries help teachers teach and children learn, children and teachers need library resources — especially books — and the expertise of a librarian to succeed. Books, information technology, and school librarians who are part of the schools' professional team are basic ingredients for student achievement."

When effective school libraries are in place, students do learn. 13,000 students cannot be wrong.