
An Introduction to the Library Power Program

Library Power is a school improvement initiative launched by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund in 1988. Total investment in the program since its inception exceeds \$45 million. Operating in approximately 700 schools and serving more than 1 million students annually, Library Power is the largest nongovernmental funding of school library services in over 30 years.

Library Power sought to improve teaching and learning in public elementary and middle schools through better and innovative uses of enhanced and up-to-date libraries. Grants from the Fund, totaling \$1.2 million over three years to each of the participating Library Power communities, were used to renovate library space; purchase new books and upgrade print and electronic collections; and provide professional development to librarians, teachers, and principals to learn how to work together to make the best use of their new libraries.

In return, each school had to commit to hiring and paying the salaries of full-time librarians, keep the library open and accessible to everyone throughout the school day, and increase spending for books, software, and educational materials.

The goals for Library Power were based on guidelines contained in *Information Power*, a 1988 publication of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT). They were:

- To create a national vision and new expectations for public elementary and middle school library programs and to encourage new and innovative uses of the library's physical and human resources;
- To create exemplary models of library media programs that are integral to the educational process;
- To strengthen the role of the librarian as a teacher information specialist, and learning facilitator who assists teachers and students in becoming effective users of ideas and information;
- To encourage collaboration among teachers, administrators, and librarians that results in significant improvement in the teaching and learning process;
- To demonstrate the significant contributions that library programs can make to school reform and restructuring efforts;
- To encourage the creation of partnerships among leaders in school districts, public libraries, community agencies, business communities, academic institutions, and parent groups to improve and support school library programs.

Responsibility for managing individual Library Power projects was given to local education funds (LEFs)—tax-exempt, nonprofit, community-based organizations that work to build community support for high-quality public education. The LEF leadership, whether LEF directors or Library Power directors, like educators in participating districts, were dedicated, enthusiastic people committed to promoting positive change in student learning through school libraries.

Most, but not all, of the communities were in urban locations. The level of library services among the participating sites ranged from schools that had no librarians or school libraries to communities with school libraries, full-time librarians, and district-level library media supervisors. Despite these differences, all communities had a need and desire to enhance and elevate the role of their libraries in supporting and promoting student learning.

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of the American Library Association, was one of the Fund's two partner agencies assisting on Library Power. It provided technical assistance to sites, such as inservice professional development, consultations, publicity, and coordination of annual national meetings with the Fund's other partner, the Public Education Network (PEN). PEN concentrated on providing technical assistance to local education funds.

The School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison conducted the national evaluation of Library Power. The evaluation involved multi-year surveys of librarians, principals, and teachers and 34 multi-year case studies conducted in eight of the 19 communities.