School Libraries in the United States of America: An Update Report

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This update of Marilyn Miller's 1991 report on school libraries in the United States begins with a general description of education in a climate of school reform and then describes the state of school library media centers in terms of expenditures and resources, staffing, and professional preparation and support. The report also describes the new national guidelines and student learning standards, Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning, *released in 1998 by AASL.*

Introduction

In the United States, responsibility for education is reserved to the individual 50 states under the Tenth Amendment of the US Constitution. As a result, the organization of public schools is varied by state laws, funding, and supervision. Although the state governments have responsibility for education, the US courts have ruled that under the "general welfare" clause of the Constitution, Congress may enact laws that affect public education. Responsibility for administering federal efforts in relation to schools rests with the US Department of Education, but there is no general federal funding for schools. Rather, the federal government provides funds for special programs, including libraries, in the form of categorical federal aid.

Since the publication of the *Nation at Risk* Report in 1983 (National Commission on Excellence in Education), concern about the condition of education in America has dictated that the federal government take a more active role in education to ensure the "general welfare" of the country. Rapid political, economic, and technological change and perceptions of low student achievement in American schools have contributed to the demand for educational improvement. Public outcry from a large numbers of Americans—employers, parents, not-for-profit groups, politicians, educators, and scholars—over an educational system that is perceived to have failed has hoisted educational reform to the top of national and local agendas and spurred demands that American students be prepared with the skills they need to be productive citizens in a democratic society and a global economy. In 1990, the eight National Education Goals were approved by President Bush and all governors of the 50 states. In 1991, the America 2000 strategy to mobilize the country toward meeting those goals was adopted. Much state funding, as well as program priorities for federal categorical funding, have

since focused on achievement of the National Education Goals. The National Education Goals Panel was created in 1990 and became an independent national agency in 1994. The responsibilities of the Panel include working to establish a system of high academic standards and assessments; identifying actions for federal, state, and local governments to take; and building a nationwide, bipartisan consensus to achieve the Goals.[1] Heeding this call to action, multiple organizations and associations are actively participating in the movement for educational reform and the achievement of the Goals.[2] Three of the most prominent of these are the Alliance of Curriculum Reform (ACR), consisting of member organizations including the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), which is concerned with improving curriculum and instruction in elementary and secondary schools; the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE), founded by regional school accreditation associations across the country for the purpose of providing educational leaders with state-of-the-art evaluation materials and services to enhance and promote student growth and school improvement, and who with ACR jointly developed a set of learning outcomes, *Common Goals for Student Learning*, as a tool for teachers and library media specialists to use in linking information literacy with other content areas of the curriculum; and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), which is dedicated to creating and setting standards for master teacher proficiency and national certification in an effort to improve teaching performance. Issues at the forefront of the school reform movement include information technology and curriculum integration, interdisciplinary learning, toughening of student learning standards and effective assessment, improvement of teacher training, community involvement, educational accountability, education research, and education funding. The federal government also established the National Assessment Governing Board, an independent entity given authority to study and develop national education tests. In addition, most of the 50 states have raised standards for student learning and performance.

Historically, school libraries in the US have been considered important to the educational mission of schools. The recognition that today's students must be technologically literate and must be skillful consumers, users, and producers of information has prompted increased attention to the role school library media centers play in the academic achievement of students. Research conducted in Colorado (Lance, Welborn, & Hamilton-Pennell, 1993) has demonstrated that the size of the library staff and the library collection is a predictor of the academic achievement of students. The data also suggest that the collaboration between teachers and school library media specialists, combined with the presence of large school library collections, were key factors in student academic success. However, little additional funding has been forthcoming to improve the resources available to support student learning through school library media programs or to support additional professional library media staffing. Some pending legislation that might

increase funding for libraries is the granting of discounted telecommunica-
tion rates (e-rates) to schools and libraries; ESEA Title VI, Innovative Educa-
tion Program Strategies, which may be used for school library materials; and
the Library Services and Technology Act, which allocates funds to state
libraries to distribute as subgrants to libraries, including school libraries, for
technology innovation and electronic connectivity.[3]

Schools and School Library Media Centers

Education in the US is structured into three levels—elementary, secondary,
and postsecondary—with students spending seven to nine years in the
elementary grades, followed by a four- to six-year secondary school pro-
gram, with pupils normally finishing the entire compulsory education pro-
gram through grade 12 or by age 17 or 18. Students may then elect to
continue postsecondary education in either a technical or vocational institu-
tion or in a two- or four-year college or university. Students attend either
public or privately funded educational institutions. According to the most
recent US Department of Education National Center for Educational Statis-
tics (NCES)[4] report, *The Digest of Education Statistics 1996*, there are an es-
timated 52.2 million students in kindergarten through grade 12 enrolled in
107,857 public and private schools in the US. Of those schools, 76,545, or
95.8%, of the public schools and 21,431, or 86.8%, of the private schools report
having school library media centers. All public schools with an enrollment of
more than 2,000 pupils have school library media centers, but the percentage
for small schools, those with enrollments of fewer than 300 students, drops to
85.4%. Generally, the largest schools are secondary schools and the smallest
schools are elementary.

Staffing and Professional Preparation

There are 58,738 librarians and other professional media staff administering
the 76,545 public school libraries and 9,497 staff in the 21,431 private school
libraries. The NCES data indicate that over a quarter of the schools with
school library media centers, particularly at the elementary level and in
private schools, lack professional staffing, and 8% of schools with library
media centers do not employ any staff at all, professional or nonprofessional.
The NCES data also indicate that although most students are served by
library media centers, staffing levels of these centers are not keeping pace
with increases in pupil enrollments.

Professional school librarians and other professional media staff are
defined as those who meet appropriate state certification requirements.
However, as school library media program requirements vary by state, so
also do school library media specialist preparation programs and certifica-
tion requirements. Between 200 and 250 library education programs in the
US prepare school library media professionals, 53 of which are graduate
programs accredited by the American Library Association (ALA). The

remaining programs range from those that offer major and minor concentrations at the undergraduate level leading to certification as a school library media specialist to graduate programs leading to the master's degree in education, educational media, instructional technology, and library and information science. The ALA recommends the graduate degree as the entry level for the school library media specialist. State certification requirements for certification as a school library media specialist range from an MLS degree with specified competences to a requirement of any 12 credit hours of library science and audiovisual courses. Almost all states require that the library media specialist be certificated as a teacher prior to certification as a library media specialist, and most are paid on the same salary scale as teachers. Continuing education for teachers and school library media specialists continues to be a concern. A changing learning environment, marked by the influx of instructional technology and the need for students to develop information literacy competence, and a shift in the teaching role to that of coach and facilitator of student learning, demand that teachers and school librarians be provided with ample professional development opportunities.

Expenditures and Resources

Expenditures for library resources in public school library media centers as reported by the NCES for the 1992-1993 school term averaged $14.48 per student. A breakdown of that amount reveals an average per student expenditure of $8.52 for books, $2.18 for serial subscriptions, $1.24 for video materials, $0.82 for other audiovisual materials, $1.09 for microcomputer software, and $0.63 for CD-ROM titles. Libraries in public schools held an average of 2,585 books per 100 students compared with an average of 3,716 at private schools. A series of surveys of expenditures for resources in school library media centers has been conducted by Miller and Shontz since 1983. The latest summary in the series (Miller & Shontz, 1997, based on the FY 1995-96) reports that expenditures for books did not change, that spending for computer software increased slightly, that spending for other resources— AV, periodicals, microforms, and CD-ROM—dropped slightly, and that median expenditures for all resources dipped from the previous year's survey. In addition, the Miller and Shontz survey reports the demise in library media centers of the general AV collection, which includes filmstrips, films, and audiocassettes and describes the significant growth of video collections.

There has been a widespread introduction of computer-based technology into the schools. The NCES has surveyed and tracked the growth of Internet access from 1994 through 1997. The number of schools with Internet access has increased rapidly from 35% in 1994 to 78% in 1997, but most schools are not extensively connected. Only 14% of instructional rooms have Internet access, but the percentage of schools with Internet access in five or more instructional rooms increased from 25% in 1996 to 43% in 1997. In the 1993-

1994 school year, about one third of the library media centers in public schools had computers with modems, automated circulation systems, and database searching capability with CD-ROM; 9% had online database searching capability; and 47% had the capability to use compact disk-based periodical indices. Of major concern is that library media center resources are directly related to the poverty level of the school. For example, schools with low poverty levels, as indicated by 5% or fewer students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, were more likely than schools with high poverty levels, with 41% or more of students eligible for free or reduced price lunches, to have library media centers equipped with modems, an automated circulation system, database searching capability with CD-ROM, online database capability, and connection to the Internet. Public school library media centers were far more likely to have electronic resources and connection to the Internet than private school library media centers. Schools continue to seek outside funding for resources. Ten percent of schools reporting indicated that businesses provided funding for electronic resources and telecommunication services, 18% reported that parents or other community members provided funding, and 6% reported that community organizations such as libraries or museums provided funding. Still, the most likely source of support was the school districts themselves, and the second most frequent source was state or federal government agencies.

Profession Support and National Guidelines

Each of the 50 states has either a library or media professional association that includes an organizational unit for school library media specialists or a separate association only for school library media specialists. As is the purpose of most professional associations, these aim to communicate developments in the field and provide continuing education and professional development opportunities to the members. The largest national association of school library media specialists is the AASL, a division of the ALA, with over 8,000 members. All state school library media associations can affiliate with the AASL as members of the Affiliate Assembly that meets regularly at ALA conferences and serves as a two-way communication, information, dissemination, and support vehicle for professional concerns between the state affiliates and the national association. The AASL also maintains formal and informal liaison and affiliate relationships with other professional associations such as the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), the International Association of School Librarians (IASL), the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and the Alliance for Curriculum Reform (ACR).[5]

In 1996, the AASL conducted a survey of the field and used the data from this survey to restructure the association to meet the needs and reflect the values of the profession. The AASL also identified four association priorities: reading; technology; revision and implementation of the national guidelines;

and advocacy. Two successful initiatives, *Count on Reading* and *ICONnect*, were developed to support the identified priorities of reading and technology. An Advocacy Task Force was appointed and development of a plan began to train AASL members to be effective advocates for school libraries and for adequate professional staffing and funding for resources to support student learning.

A revision of the 1988 guidelines, *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs*, jointly authored by the AASL and the AECT, is to be published by the ALA in 1998, and a national plan for implementation of the new guidelines has been developed. The revision, *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*, builds on the long history of guidelines and standards published by the ALA in the years 1920, 1945, 1960, 1969, 1975, and 1988. Over time, the focus of school library media programs has moved from resources to students to creating a community of lifelong learners. As with previous publications, the new guidelines and standards are designed to foster improvement in school library media programs, and the content and approach of this revision reflect societal, educational, and technological changes. *Information Power: Building Parnerships for Learning* is built on a set of nine Information Literacy Standards organized into three categories with 29 indicators and designed to support the library media specialist in the three major areas of learning and teaching, information access, and program administration. The guidelines present the three elements of collaboration, leadership, and technology as unifying themes that underlie and support those areas as illustrated in Figure 1.

This edition of *Information Power* contains two parts. The first includes the vision of the document and the information literacy standards for student learning. This section will also be published as a separate volume entitled *Information Literacy Standards for Student Learning*, which presents only the learning standards. The second section of the document covers the school library media program's three major areas of responsibility structured around a series of 27 principles identified as the cardinal premises on which an effective school library media program is based. As guidelines, rather than prescriptions, the principles can be used to direct the work of the school library media specialist to construct an effective, student-centered library media program. The guidelines also demonstrate how the school library media specialist can initiate collaboration with teachers and foster connections with the greater learning community. It also provides references and supporting documents for further exploration.[6]

Other professional support can be found in the publication of monographs and serials for the profession. In 1998, the AASL launched the publication of a new association journal, *Knowledge Quest*. It is published five times a year and is aimed at building-level library media specialists, supervisors, library educators, and others concerned with the development of school library media programs. Its purpose is to promote effective practice,
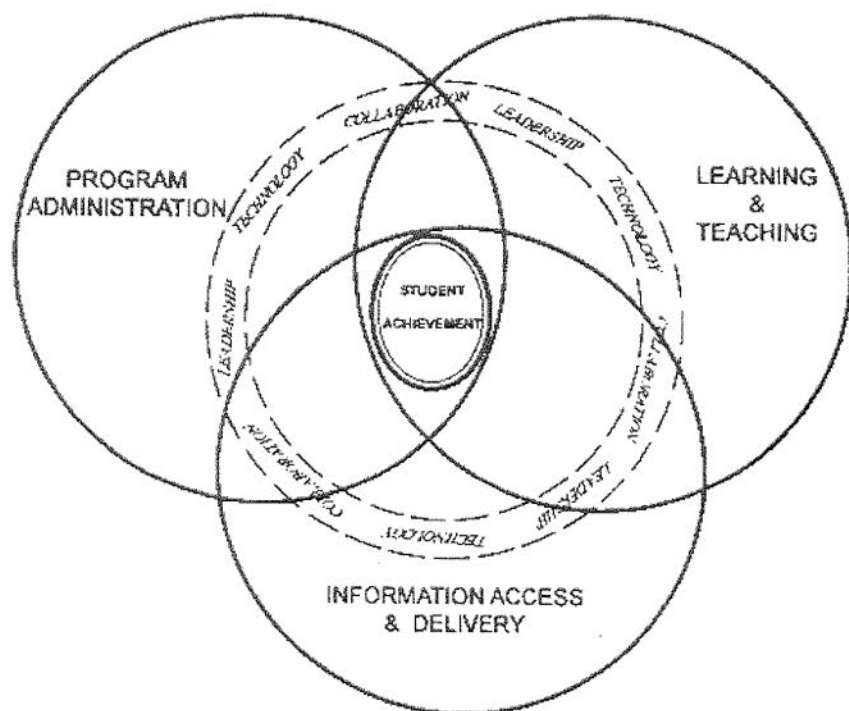
Figure 1. Elements of the library media program.
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Association for Educational Communications and Technology.

encourage scholarship, and provide information on new developments in the field and related disciplines. Subscriptions are provided with membership, but nonmembers can subscribe by contacting the subscriptions department of the ALA. *School Library Media Quarterly* remains an AASL journal but has been reborn in electronic format as *School Library Media Quarterly Online: The Refereed Research Journal of AASL* and can be viewed from the ALA website. Its purpose is to publish substantive, refereed articles to assist school library media specialists in integrating theory and practice and to encourage scholarship and research in the field. *School Libraries Worldwide,* the refereed journal of IASL, provides a twice yearly international forum for people interested in promoting effective school library programs worldwide and is provided with membership, but nonmembers can subscribe by contacting IASL. Commercial journals such as *Emergency Librarian: The Journal for School Library Professionals* and *School Library Journal* are also widely read. *School Library Media Annual,* published yearly from 1983-1994 by Libraries Unlimited, has reviewed the year's activities and issues of the field in reports,

essays, and lists; its place will soon be taken by a new biannual publication, *Principles and Practices*, also published by Libraries Unlimited.[7]

Notes

[1] Additional information on the National Education Goals and the National Education Panel can be found on the National Education Panel website http://www.nepg.gov. The site provides a list of the National Goals; key issues related to the Goals; national and state progress summaries and state scorecards; technical notes on data collection, national and state core indicators; and publication information. Publications can be downloaded electronically or are available from the National Education Goals Panel, 1255 22nd Street, NW, Suite 502, Washington, D.C. 20037.

[2] A list of organizations involved in education policy or education reform is available on the *Education Week on the Web* website at http://www.edweek.org/context/orgs/orgs.htm. Each listing includes background information about the organization, its mailing address and phone number, and, when available, an e-mail address and a link to the organization's home page.

[3] Current information on legislative issues affecting school libraries, libraries, and education is available on the ALA Washington Office website at http://www.ala.org/washoff/.

[4] All data referenced to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) in this manuscript are from the NCES website at http://nces.ed.gov. The purpose of the NCES is to collect data and report statistics and information showing the condition and progresses of education in the US and other nations in order to promote and accelerate the improvement of American education. The NCES data and publications are available online from the NCES site, in print from the US Government Printing Office, or through the Database of Education Publications of ERIC at http://www.ed.gov/pubs/pubdb.html.

[5] Information about the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) and its publications is available on the AASL website at http://www.ala.org/aasl/index.html, by calling 1-800-545-2433 or (312) 280-4216, or by contacting AASL/ALA, 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611.

[6] Additional information about *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* is available from the website at http://www.ala.org/aasl/infopwrmenu.html.

[7] *Emergency Librarian* is published bimonthly except for July-August by Rockland Press, Box 34069, Department 284, Seattle, Washington 98124. *School Library Journal* is published 11 times a year by Cahners/R.R. Bowker Magazine Group, Subscription Department, P.O. Box 1978, Marion Ohio 43305 and *SLJ Online* is available at http://www.bookwire.com/slj/. *School Libraries Worldwide* is published twice yearly by IASL and subscriptions are available by contacting IASL, Suite 300, Box 34069, Seattle, Washington 98124. *School Library Media Annual* is published annually by Libraries Unlimited, Inc., P.O. Box 263, Littleton, Colorado 80160.

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