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Although charter schools are a growing segment of the US education market, they are less likely than traditional public or private schools to have dedicated library facilities, staffing, or services. Currently there is little data about what services charter schools provide to support literacy, research, or technology skill building - services commonly provided by school libraries. Without these data it is unknown whether, how, or to what extent charter schools without school libraries ensure that their students have access to these crucial learning resources. This study collected data in 87 US based K-12 charter schools across 11 states using an online survey completed by school administrators. This survey addresses library services of charter schools both with and without school library facilities. The survey shows that most charters lack facilities and staffing to provide quality school library services. In charters that have a school library the data suggests the school benefits from more services to encourage reading for fun and information literacy instruction that can improve technology use and research skills. This study informs future research and advocacy for charter school libraries.

Introduction

Charter schools have been a growing segment of the K-12 school market (serving students 5-18 years old) in the United States of America (US). Their growth accelerated during the pandemic with enrollment growing 7% during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years with enrollment holding steady for the 2022-23 school year (Irwin et al., 2021; Langreo, 2022). As charter schools grow from a niche school choice into a mainstream education alternative, the urgency of ensuring that their students are provided equal educational opportunities grows. The school library is a vital resource for promoting literacy, technology, and research skills, so when charter schools are less likely to provide school library services to their students, the likelihood of an equity gap for an increasing proportion of US students grows.

In the US, only 62.2% of charter schools have a school library (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). However, all schools benefit from educational services and resources provided by SLs. The academic benefits of SLs and librarians are well documented, demonstrating that they lead to better test scores, reading proficiency, and college readiness (Achterman, 2008; Huisman, 2015; Kuon et al., 2014; Lance et al., 2014). There is also an adverse impact on academic achievement when a school lacks a SL (Frogatt, 2015).
School libraries provide books for academic and pleasure reading, instruction in literacy and research topics, technology support, and flexible academic and social space. Schools without school library facilities may be providing some or all those services internally or through partnerships with outside organizations. More likely, schools without a formal teacher librarian provide fewer or less robust library services. For instance, teachers can informally lend books to students through classroom libraries; however, the selection is more limited than the school library, and teachers must spend their limited time and money to build and maintain a classroom book collection.

School libraries have been shown to increase academic achievement and college readiness and potentially contribute to student well-being (Huisman, 2015; Lance et al., 2014; Merga, 2020), yet school libraries are absent from many US charter schools. Charter schools are evaluated differently from traditional schools, so they often employ different pedagogical practices that can increase their effectiveness. For instance, they may have longer school days or a longer school year, write their own curriculum, embed social-emotional support, or discipline students differently than traditional schools. Understanding that charter schools are often unique among US K-12 schools, school library services may also be delivered differently or not at all. This study seeks information about school library facilities, services, and staffing to increase the understanding of school libraries in the US charter school context. The following research questions guide this study:

RQ1: To what extent do charter schools provide school library facilities, services, and/or staffing?
RQ2: Within charter schools how are school library services that support literacy, technology, and research skill preparation addressed in schools with and without a school library facility?

**Review of Literature**

**US Charter Schools**
Charter schools started in the 1990s in the US as an entrepreneurial approach to providing school choice in urban public-school districts that were perceived as not meeting all students’ needs. The expansion of charter schools has reached 44 states in the US to meet the growing segment of the K-12 market. The percentage of K-12 public school students attending charter schools went from 3% in 2008 to 7% in 2018 (Irwin et al., 2021). Charter school enrollment growth accelerated during the pandemic by 7% (Langreo, 2022). A study of parent satisfaction with K-12 schools showed high levels of parent satisfaction across all school types, but charter school parents were more satisfied than assigned district parents when asked about teachers, academic standards, school discipline, and communication (Cheng & Peterson, 2017). Differences in school accountability and oversight may allow for more personalized learning and greater flexibility in curriculum and discipline policies contributing to satisfaction rates.

Charter schools are primarily accountable for fulfilling the objectives stated in their charters instead of the accreditation rules districts follow (Bitz, 2016). Like private schools, charters may fill a niche by serving a particular subpopulation of students (for example teen parents, LGBTQ+, or neuro-atypical), specializing in an academic focus (for example STEM, performing arts, or leadership), or following an educational philosophy (for example Montessori, dual language, or trauma-informed). Charter school outcomes have been as varied as their goals. Several studies have compared public and charter school academic achievement with varying results, as well as some findings of indistinguishable academic outcomes (Adzima, 2017; Gulosino & Liebert, 2020). In two
studies of California charter schools, Gulosino and Liebert (2020) found nuanced differences in academic achievement, while Adzima (2017) found that charters outscored traditional public schools. Noting that the greatest academic progress is made in a few high performing charters, Cohodes (2018) analyzed the characteristics of the most effective charters to extract best practices for education that can be widely utilized in K-12 schools. Charter school facilities also vary widely affecting academic and extracurricular offerings. One downside to the funding model for charter schools is that they often have difficulty raising or borrowing money for capital expenses, leaving many to share spaces with other organizations or doing without specialized facilities like gymnasiums, libraries, and cafeterias (National Charter School Resource Center, 2020).

Staffing can also be different in charters than traditional public schools. Charter leaders, particularly those who are also founders of an independent charter not run by an outside management organization, often balance managerial roles more like an entrepreneurial start-up with their classroom teaching and administrative roles (Thomas & Lacey, 2016). For charter teachers, subject knowledge may outweigh teaching certification in hiring practices and professional development priorities. This is dependent on state regulations. In a comparison between charter and public-school teachers in Texas, charter schoolteachers reported higher expectations of student performance, but also reported less frequent collaboration with colleagues, fewer professional development opportunities, and less instructional support (Wei et al., 2014). An environment with high academic expectations, but where teachers feel a need for more collaboration, professional development, and instructional support, describes an organization that would benefit from a school library program and a teacher librarian. National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries encourage teacher librarians to develop collegial relationships and collaborate with educators, providing support around planning and teaching (AASL, 2018).

Benefits of School Libraries
In line with AASL Standards, teacher librarians frequently help teachers by providing instructional support, collaboration, and professional development. Studies show the more closely teachers work with teacher librarians, the more useful teachers find teacher librarians to be (Golden, 2021). Administrators, too, value school libraries when they communicate with their teacher librarians and the librarian’s roles are clearly defined (Taylor, 2016). Blakeney (2014) found that principals in an urban Alabama school district expressed appreciation for the importance of teacher librarians, especially regarding reading motivation and skills, and found that these administrators had a good understanding of school librarianship. An Australian study also showed school principals’ appreciation for teacher librarians, although administrators valued their roles as teachers above their roles as librarians, which may have repercussions for school library programs (Lupton, 2016). While this research shows that teachers and school administrators are generally supportive of their school libraries, it has not ensured universally adequate funding and staffing. The absence of school library support is especially acute in charter schools, where school library programs are not linked to accreditation.

It is important to understand the impact school libraries have on student academic achievement to identify unmet academic needs in charter schools without school libraries. Achterman (2008) studied the strength of relationships between student achievement on standardized tests, certified school library staff, and twenty-one common school library services (e.g., reader’s advisory, research instruction, technology support). Significant strong relationships were
found between library services and student achievement, and staffing levels were found to be directly related to the number and effectiveness of services offered. The Library Research Service (2018) has conducted school library impact studies in twenty US states since 1999 showing school library characteristics associated with better test scores. LRS studies found academic benefits as measured by standardized testing when school libraries were appropriately staffed, funded, and used (Lance et al., 2014). School libraries also effectively support rigorous Common Core Standards through the resources collected in the library and the instructional practices of the teacher librarian (Kuon et al., 2014). An academic concern for US high schools (grades 9-12, ages 14-18) is college readiness, and Huisman (2015) found that school library programs clearly help to prepare urban high school students for college. A school library could be the missing resource in underachieving charter schools.

In addition to academic benefits, the literature is beginning to recognize the benefits of school library practices to support student well-being. Merga (2020) affirms that school libraries support student mental health and wellbeing by making the library a safe space, providing bibliotherapy, and promoting mental health resources. Harper (2017) also suggests teacher librarians should intentionally provide services rooted in the ethics of care to support student social and emotional development. Multiple studies have shown that school libraries can also be a tool for equity because they particularly impact low-income student reading behaviors (Wood et al., 2020). Low-income students use the library to greater benefit than wealthier peers, and well-stocked school libraries with competent teacher librarians help increase student achievement (Adkins, 2014). Froggatt (2015) took a social justice perspective hypothesizing that students without access to a school library are in formationally underserved, finding that lower test scores are correlated with lack of access to an active school library program.

The emphasis in these articles on active library programs with competent staff and well-developed collections draws attention to the need for funding in under-resourced schools to reduce structural inequality. Lance and Kachel SLIDE (2022) note that losing library staff contributes to inequality, particularly because library cuts have been greatest in prevalent poverty districts and those with majority Black students. Equity is a critical issue for charter schools. Charters enroll a higher percentage of students from low-income families than traditional schools, a higher percentage of charters are in urban areas, and charters are more likely than traditional schools to serve school communities that are more than 50% Black or Hispanic (NCES, 2022).

As a loosely regulated, experimental and entrepreneurial education market, charter schools are unique. While school libraries are nearly universal in traditional schools, they are far less so in charter schools. And while the number of charter schools is growing, the charter school segment of the K-12 education market is less likely to have school libraries than traditional schools possibly causing some charter schools to perform less well than others. Considering the school libraries are important for student academic and social-emotional outcomes, it should be a priority to understand the school library gap in charter schools. No studies have yet tried to understand the presence of school library facilities, services, and staffing in US charter schools. Charter schools are entrepreneurial, often cultivating partnerships or co-locating with other organizations that could supplement school library services, but the impact of charter school partnerships on students’ literacy, technology, or research skills remains unstudied. This study begins to identify which school library services are offered in charter schools to increase understanding about the school library
benefits that charter school students may lack. Unfortunately, many school leaders are unaware of the benefits of school libraries and do not recognize the opportunities a school library program could provide to their school community.

**Detrimental School Library Misconceptions**

Misconceptions and lack of awareness about what teacher librarians do are widely considered a problem for school library support and funding. Everhart and Mardis (2014) conducted information sessions with focus groups to inform stakeholders about Pennsylvania school libraries and build a foundation for advocacy in the wake of decreasing school library budgets. They found that education stakeholders were willing to be school library advocates once they learned what contemporary libraries do for their schools. The literature on US school libraries, especially trade publications intended for practitioners, includes several articles about how to advocate for school library budgets and staff positions. Unfortunately, many people have outdated ideas about libraries that suggest libraries are no longer relevant, so librarians need to help the public understand how today’s school libraries serve students and teachers. Recently, US culture war politics that frame librarians as purveyors of pornographic books have also intentionally planted misconceptions about school library collections, staffing, and services.

Takeda (2019) recommends teacher librarians should approach administrators with collection and circulation data, connections to standards, and a clear statement of the need to improve collection diversity when making budget requests to clarify how the school library supports academic outcomes and positive school climate. Haycock and Stenström (2016) found that funding requests for school libraries are most successful when teacher librarians have positive relationships with decision-makers, so teacher librarians should actively network with leadership in their schools and districts to assure future support. Positive personal relationships create opportunities to inform stakeholders and override misconceptions.

Increasingly, teacher librarians provide technology instruction and support. Evolving technology roles may require redefining teacher librarian responsibilities, changes to school library services, and additional professional development. A recent study of Utah teacher librarians found they need training, collaboration, support, and resources to be leaders in newly mandated digital citizenship instruction, a change that did not account for the capacity of teacher librarians to expand instructional services (Phillips & Lee, 2019). Dawkins (2020) observes that widespread confusion about digital citizenship policy and curriculum leaves school districts without clear leadership or adequate instruction around digital citizenship instruction which may or may not fall on teacher librarians. As school library services evolve, teacher librarians need to communicate with administrators about priorities for available resources and access to additional resources to be sure school library programs meet their school community’s needs. Knowledge gaps, misconceptions, and a changing technology landscape can explain why school libraries are not prioritized in charter school design and funding, but cultivating allies for school libraries helps school leaders to make informed decisions about services that benefit students and teachers.

**Methodology**

This study aims to find out to what extent charter schools provide beneficial school library facilities, services, and staffing. It also surveys what aspects of services like literacy, technology, and research
skill preparation are provided in charter schools with and without school library facilities. Previous research describes charter schools and finds evidence for the benefits of school libraries but did not collect data about school library services in charter schools. Surveying charter schools about their school library services can show inequities and opportunities to improve charter school student outcomes.

**Study Sample**

According to *The Condition of Education 2021* there are about 7,400 public charter schools currently operating in 44 US states (Irwin et al., 2021). No national directory of charter schools was available, but many state departments of education publish online state directories with contact information for the principal or head administrator. I created a convenience sample of 2,340 administrator contacts and sent survey invitations to 1,200 random school administrator emails. To create the email list, I first randomized US states where charter schools are allowed. Then, starting with the first state on the list, I began finding and compiling directory contact information from state department of education websites, skipping states where it was not possible to export contact information. When the spreadsheet had complete data from eleven states (FL, ID, KS, ME, MN, NM, OH, SC, TN, TX, UT) representing geographic and population diversity, there were 2,340 email addresses for charter school leaders.

I used Excel to assign random numbers to each contact, allowing me to randomly sort the spreadsheet and export 400 email addresses for the first batch of invitations to the online survey. Based on the response rate in the first week, I sent invitations to an additional random 800 of the remaining email addresses. Delivery failed to 154 (12.83%) of the email addresses invited. The survey was open for 31 days, and 87 charter school administrators completed the survey (8.32% response rate for working email addresses). It was hosted on Qualtrics and collected responses from February 15 to March 17, 2022. Because the study is unfunded, the free version of Qualtrics was used, limiting total questions to fifteen and responses to one hundred. The small sample is not generalizable, but the dataset allows an initial exploration of the state of charter school library services.

**Data Collection**

This pilot study used a quantitative fifteen question multiple choice survey to ask public charter school administrators about their schools (See Appendix A). The survey collected demographic information about the participant’s charter school (See Appendix B for summary). It asked about resources and services offered by a participant’s school that promote literacy, teach research skills, and support technology. I asked participants about physical library facilities (school library, makerspace, classroom libraries), online library services (website, databases), and staffing (librarian, assistant). In the survey, administrators were asked to select all that apply for lists of library services related to literacy, technology, and research skill development. Questions about library services focused on course topics or extracurricular activities frequently, but not exclusively, housed in school libraries.

**Data Analysis**

The data from this survey describes library services at charter schools - both schools with and without school libraries. I exported the full dataset to Excel for analysis and used filters in Qualtrics to separate schools with and without school libraries for separate analysis. Separating data for
schools that reported having a physical school library from those that reported not having a physical school library allowed comparison between the two groups. The most useful comparisons were proportions of services in schools with and without school libraries.

I used descriptive analyses in Qualtrics and Excel to compare characteristics of participants’ schools and create frequency distributions of school demographics and school library services. I found central tendencies for total school library services and programs to show where the means were similar or different. Using odds ratios, I found the differences in likelihood that schools in the sample with and without school libraries and librarians teach information literacy skills relating to technology and academic honesty. I used R to run linear regressions and t-tests on the distributions of school library services in schools with and without school libraries to produce confidence intervals for a mean number of services. The small sample limited meaningful inferential statistics, but the exploratory nature of the study provides foundational data for future studies that can lead to deeper insights about the charter school library landscape.

Findings

Facilities and Staffing
Of the participating charter schools, 57% (n=50) responded that they have a physical school library facility (see Figure 1). One might assume that the smaller proportion of school library facilities in charter schools reflects school enrollment, since NCES (2018) found only 56% of public and 63% of private K-12 schools with under 100 students have school library facilities. But, for traditional schools with at least 200 students, over 91% of public and private schools have a school library (NCES, 2018). While the larger charters in my study were more likely to have a physical school library, the rate was still far below traditional schools. Only 42% (n=14) of charters with fewer than 200 students (n=33) had a school library facility, and 67% (n=36) of charters with more than 200 students (n=54) had a school library facility. Classroom libraries were the most popular answer for surveyed schools. 72% of schools with a physical school library had classroom libraries (n=36), and 51% of schools without a school library had classroom libraries (n=19).

Figure 1. School library programs at charter schools surveyed by proportion.
More than half (58%) of the 50 surveyed charters with school library facilities are staffed with a librarian (n=29), and 14% have a library assistant (n=7). Only three schools in the sample had both a librarian and a library assistant. None of the schools without a school library facility were staffed with a school librarian or library assistant, but it did not stop them from offering some school library services. Only four schools reported having no school library facilities, staff, or online library resources. Each of those schools reported providing literacy, technology, and/or research services even without a school library. Most charter schools surveyed 80% (n=70) with and without physical school libraries provide access to online databases (n=46) and/or have classroom libraries (n=55).

Students are eligible for free school lunch if their family income is 130% of poverty level or below. Students are eligible for reduced cost lunches if their family income is 180% of poverty level or below. Of surveyed schools, 33 reported that 75% or more of their students are approved for free or reduced-price lunches (FRPL). Of those schools less than half (48%) have a physical library facility (n=16). As shown in Table 1, more than half of schools in each FRPL category have school libraries. While the study was not designed to compare differences in school libraries across grade levels, the data showed more school libraries in schools that serve younger grade levels. Of the 54 schools surveyed that include elementary grades (ages 5-12, grades K-6), 39 have a school library (72%), while only 18 of the 43 schools serving high school grades have a school library (42%). Fourteen schools serve grades K-12 and were included in both categories; nine (64%) of those schools have a physical school library. A skew toward school libraries in the younger grades is also present in the NCES (2018) US public school data where 95% of elementary schools have school libraries compared with 80% of high schools.

Table 1. Table of free/reduced lunch and library facilities in participating charter schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Free/Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>No Library</th>
<th>Has Library</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-34%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-49%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-74%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75% or more</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School doesn’t participate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School Library Services
Schools were asked about what services, resources, and policies they have in place to encourage reading for fun, teach technology, and promote academic honesty (preventing plagiarism as a research skill). As shown in Figure 2, schools with a physical school library were more likely to have programs encouraging reading for fun including book fairs, reading incentive programs, and summer reading. Schools with a physical library reported providing a mean of 2.54 reading for fun
programs with a standard deviation of 1.36. The mean for schools without a physical library is 1.76 with a standard deviation of 1.46. The most popular way participating schools encourage reading for fun is through book fairs, offered by 74% of schools with a school library facility (n=37) and 32% of schools without a school library (n=12). At 95% confidence, schools with a school library provide an average of 0.17-1.40 more reading for fun programs than schools without a school library. The data indicates with statistical significance that beyond participants in this study, charter schools with a physical library are more likely to have more reading for fun programs.

Figure 2. Programs encouraging reading for fun.

Across all participants surveyed with and without school libraries, the most popular technology topics included in school curriculum or extracurricular activities were online safety and digital citizenship (67% of schools surveyed, n=58), web searching (61%, n=53), and e-learning tools (56%, n=49). Figure 3 shows that schools with a physical school library were more likely to teach online safety and digital citizenship, coding/programming, and typing than schools without a physical library.

Figure 3. Technology topics in school curriculum or extracurricular activities.
Schools with a library reported including a mean of 4.68 technology topics in school curriculum or extracurricular activities (standard deviation 2.06), almost the same as the mean of 4.62 in schools without physical libraries (standard deviation 2.79). The difference is not statistically significant (p = 0.91). Most schools with and without a library facility provided multiple opportunities for students to build technology skills in class or extracurricular activities. Robust technology services do not require a physical school library, although school libraries can provide valuable opportunities for engagement with technology. Schools vary on how much and in what capacity school library programs support technology skill development, and the survey shows that schools with and without school libraries are similar in their offering of this type of support. In contrast, teacher librarians do seem to make a difference in teaching online safety and digital citizenship as schools in the study with a teacher librarian were 1.41 times more likely to provide that instruction. In schools with a librarian or media specialist, 83% teach online safety and digital citizenship (24 out of 29 schools) compared to only 59% of schools without (34 of 58 schools).

Schools promote academic honesty through policy (plagiarism policy or honor code), consequences (academic or disciplinary consequences), and skill building (teaching about crediting sources or copyright). Most schools (90%, n=78) have an honor code, plagiarism policy, and/or academic or disciplinary consequences for plagiarism establishing expectations that students adhere to academic honesty. The mean number of ways schools promote academic honesty at schools surveyed was 3.63. Most popular were teaching students to quote and cite sources (69% of all schools surveyed, n=60) and academic consequences for plagiarism (66%, n=57). Higher proportions of schools with a school library teach students to quote and cite sources and teach about copyright, while higher proportions of schools without a school library have academic and disciplinary consequences for plagiarism and a plagiarism policy (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4. How schools address academic honesty.**

Of the 50 schools with a library, 82% (n=41) teach students to quote and cite sources and/or instruct students about copyright, while only 68% (n=25) of the schools without a library provide
either kind of skill building instruction for academic honesty. Charter schools in the study with a library are 1.21 times more likely to teach academic honesty skills than those without a library. Schools with a librarian or media specialist are 1.35 times more likely to teach students about copyright than schools without. 21 of 29 (72%) schools with a librarian compared with 31 of 58 (53%) schools without a librarian instruct students about copyright. Overall, schools with and without a school library were similar in the total number of ways they promote academic honesty; the mean number of strategies for schools with a physical library was 3.58 compared with 3.70 for schools without. The difference in means is not statistically significant (p = 0.75). More than half of schools surveyed selected every available response to the question about academic honesty and only two selected none, demonstrating that academic honesty is an expectation across charter schools.

Discussion

Programs, policies, and resources vary from school to school, so there is enormous variation in school library services across charter schools. There are no standard national policy or curriculum expectations for charter school libraries. Each school aims to meet their charter’s objectives for accreditation. Regardless of whether they have a physical library or librarian, most charter schools provide some services, programs, or policies addressing literacy, technology, and research skills.

Although this study did not focus on socioeconomic factors, the survey corroborated NCES data that schools serving students of lower socioeconomic status are less likely to have school libraries than more affluent school communities. Using eligibility for free or reduced lunches as a measure of socioeconomic status of students, NCES (2018) found a lower presence of school libraries in high poverty schools where at least 75% of students are FRPL eligible than across all schools. Nationally, charter schools serve a higher percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch than traditional public schools (NCES, 2022). Data suggesting high poverty schools may be less likely than their peers to have a library in traditional public and charter schools could point to a pattern of inequity (Adkins, 2014; Froggatt, 2015; Lance & Kachel, 2022; Wood et al., 2020).

Since more schools surveyed that enroll younger students had school libraries, those school libraries most likely provide services most appropriate for elementary grades. The data from this present study suggests that some library services are more closely associated with younger (book fairs) or older (media literacy) student populations. Other services could be applied in age-appropriate ways across all levels, including summer reading and robotics, which are present in similar proportions across grade levels. More precise understanding of school library services offered at different schooling levels could help to guide better implementation of school library services in charter schools.

Schools surveyed that had a library facility provided more opportunities for students to participate in leisure reading and celebrate a culture of reading than schools without a school library. Although schools without a school library average fewer interventions to promote reading for fun, they seem to provide as much or slightly more opportunities for technology education and promotion of academic honesty. Librarians are well-placed to instruct students about academic honesty as a critical research skill, but ultimately all school faculty carry the responsibility of upholding these expectations for students. One thing that makes a teacher librarian a good leader in academic honesty is their training in information literacy. The survey indicates that schools with
a school library can provide their school with services through an information literacy lens, helping students to understand how and why it is critical to engage in academically honest scholarship. Teaching students to quote and cite, as well as explain copyright so they understand intellectual property provides the information literacy framework students need to avoid plagiarism, instead of simply avoiding punitive consequences of an infraction. Although schools without a school library can teach information literacy, having a school library can give information literacy a curricular home and encourage a more rigorous curriculum.

**Limitations**
I was not able to get responses from charters in all US states that have charter schools. Without a centralized database of charter leaders, I had to limit the number of states included in the survey. Time constraints and differences in state directories prevented surveying charters in all states where charter schools are legal. To compensate, I made sure my convenience sample included different US regions, smaller and larger states, rural states and states with big cities, and states with higher and lower total charter school enrollment.

While I am confident in charter school administrators’ knowledge about their own school demographics, I am less certain about their knowledge of library services. School leaders are extremely knowledgeable about their schools but depending on their specific role in the organization and their leadership style, they may not be fully aware of all practices used by educators within the school. Administration hierarchy and roles can be different in charters than in traditional schools which may facilitate distance from classrooms. The survey could have had a greater response rate from leaders of schools with school libraries and knowledge of school library services, but parallels to NCES data (2018) gave me confidence in my findings. Although teacher librarians are an ideal population to survey about school library practices, these are not present in schools without libraries. Therefore, school leaders were the best target population for this study.

**Future Research**
Survey responses underscore how widely charter schools vary. Future studies of charter schools should recognize that charter schools are not a monolith and do not necessarily share common practices, standards, or values. A qualitative inquiry involving interviews with charter school faculty could facilitate understanding of nuanced practices from school to school. Since charters schools still compose a relatively small portion of the US K-12 education market, research about them is limited and charter school libraries remain unstudied. However, as charter school enrollment grows, so does the need for research. Addressing equity gaps requires a better understanding of how education policies impact charter school libraries, how charter schools at different levels provide library services, and the role partnerships play in charter school provision of school library services.

US charter school regulations vary as well. This study aimed to get a wide view of the state of school libraries in charters across the United States. However, differences in state policies create different penalties and incentives. For instance, only one school in the survey reported that they are entirely virtual, even though the virtual charter school trend is growing where state policy allows. Closer study of charter schools from within a single state may uncover patterns unique to that state. The number of participants for this survey was not large enough to break down responses by state,
but a detailed comparison of state charter school policies and accreditation standards would inform the study of charter school library programs.

Program implementation, effectiveness, cost, and staffing were outside the scope of the survey, but would provide a richer picture of charter school library practices. To improve school library services, it is important to understand the resources that go into each service and the benefits that result. All services in the survey have varying costs and benefits, so the landscape provided by this survey is only the beginning of understanding what is currently available and what could be done in the future.

School library programs for younger students tend to support developing literacy skills while programs for older students focus more on building research skills. Thus, school libraries deliver different services and programs depending on the grades served. This study was not able to make useful comparisons between elementary (ages 5-11), middle (ages 12-13), and high schools (ages 14-18). The number of participants was too small, and more than half of the schools surveyed spanned multiple segments. There may be associations between school libraries and other services, programs, or policies by grade level that can be discovered in future studies. A study solely focusing on charter high schools or charter elementary schools could reveal clearer patterns.

In some communities, public libraries also serve schools; almost half the schools that participated in this survey who said they have partnerships with public libraries do not have school libraries. Although it is too small a dataset from which to draw conclusions, it may be useful to look more closely at schools without a library who have an explicit partnership with their public library to determine how effective school-public library partnerships are at replacing school library services. Public libraries in municipalities with schools unserved by school libraries may need additional resources to support students and teachers. The survey also indicated that some schools have partnerships with public school districts or higher education. Those charter schools may have access to school or academic library facilities or may be served by librarians at those facilities. This survey did not explore the extent to which partnerships impact library access or services. More information could guide charter school leaders as they build partnerships to make sure their school community has access to library resources.

**Conclusion**

Educators and school leaders are always trying to understand which educational practices best prepare students for success and improve school climate, engaging resources that empower teachers to be effective. Past research shows that school libraries and teacher librarians can be valuable in helping to meet educational goals, but they are not always leveraged, particularly in charter schools. This present study begins the quest for understanding the school library situation across charter schools by asking what these schools are doing about leisure reading, technology, and research skills.

It is likely many teachers shoulder additional responsibilities when their school lacks programs and personnel; it is also likely students experience deficits in areas schools cannot address adequately. This survey reveals there are charter schools without a library that do nothing to encourage reading for fun. Will their curriculum provide students enough rich reading
opportunities to become fluent readers with strong reading comprehension and a lifelong love of reading?

Studies show the benefits of libraries, but that they require a substantial initial investment, as well as ongoing maintenance and staffing. Charter school funding structures often provide for operating funds but restrict schools’ access to the capital needed to establish and maintain a library facility. Because school libraries are not mandated, and the value of school library programs is poorly understood, many charter schools choose to allocate their resources to other priorities. Questions in this survey about capital and staffing priorities indicated urgent diverse needs for buildings and grounds, teachers, staff, and administrators. However, advocacy efforts might show administrators how valuable school libraries are for a school community and help school leaders to leverage school library services in their schools, benefitting both students and teachers.

References


American Association of School Librarians. (2018). National school library standards for learners, school librarians, and school libraries. ALA.


**Author Notes**

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**Appendix A: Research Instrument Survey**

1. What is the student enrollment at your school? (Select the best answer)
   - Fewer than 100
   - 100-199
   - 200-499
   - 500-749
   - 750-999
   - 1,000 or more

2. What grades does your school serve? (Select the best answer)
   - Elementary
   - Middle
   - High
   - Other ___________________________

3. In what community type are you located? (Select the best answer)
   - City
4. What percentage of your students are approved for free or reduced-price lunches? (Select the best answer)
   - 0-34%
   - 35-49%
   - 50-74%
   - 75% or more
   - School does not participate in free or reduced-price lunch program
   - Unknown

5. Does your school share facilities with another organization? (Select the best answer)
   - Yes, another school
   - Yes, a business
   - Yes, a nonprofit organization
   - No
   - Entirely Virtual/Online School
   - Other __________________________

6. Does your school have partnerships with any of the following...? (Select all that apply)
   - Another school
   - Local business
   - Local nonprofit organization
   - Public library
   - Unknown
   - None
   - Other __________________________

7. Select all of the following that are available at your school. (Select all that apply)
   - Physical school library or media center
   - Virtual school library or library website
   - School librarian or media specialist
   - Library assistant
   - Classroom libraries
   - Online databases
   - MakerSpace or creative technology lab
   - None of these
   - Unknown
8. Select all of the following ways your school encourages reading for fun… (Select all that apply)
   - One school one book
   - Summer reading
   - Reading incentive program
   - Author visit
   - Book fair
   - Public library program
   - Other _____________________________

9. Select the technology topics included in your curriculum or extracurricular activities. (Select all that apply)
   - Typing
   - eLearning tools
   - Web searching
   - Evaluating websites for schoolwork
   - Online safety and digital citizenship
   - Using research databases
   - Video creation and editing
   - Media literacy
   - Coding / programming
   - Robotics
   - Other _____________________________

10. Select the ways your school promotes academic honesty. (Select all that apply)
    - Honor code
    - Plagiarism policy
    - Teach students how to quote and cite sources
    - Teach students about copyright
    - Academic consequences for plagiarism
    - Disciplinary consequences for plagiarism
    - Other _____________________________

11. When your school’s teachers assign projects requiring research they typically… (Select all that apply)
    - Provide books and websites for students
    - Take students to a library
    - Expect students to find sources independently
    - Other _____________________________
12. Select the topics for which your school provides professional development or training to teachers. (Select all that apply)
   - Pedagogy
   - Classroom management
   - Classroom technology
   - eLearning tools
   - Social emotional learning
   - Equity and inclusion
   - Differentiation and addressing special needs
   - Other ____________________________

13. Does your school have a school improvement or strategic plan? (Select the best answer)
   - Yes
   - No
   - Unknown

14. If your school was awarded funding for a major capital facilities, what would the top priority(ies) be… (Select your top 3)
   - New building
   - Grounds/outdoor spaces
   - Athletic/PE facilities
   - Classroom spaces
   - Library or media center
   - Health/counseling facilities
   - Food services/cafeteria
   - Visual or performing arts facilities
   - Office space
   - Technology infrastructure
   - HVAC
   - Other ____________________________

15. Select the additional personnel your school plans to hire in the next 1-3 years? (Select all that apply)
   - Administration
   - Health, mental health, or social work
   - College/future planning
   - Technology
   - Special education or ESOL
   - Classroom teacher
   - Librarian/Media specialist
   - Office support
Appendix B: Demographics of Charter Schools Surveyed

Of the 86 schools that responded to the question, 63% (n=54) serve elementary grades (grades K-5), 59% (n=51) middle grades (grades 6-8), 50% (n=43) high school grades (grades 9-12), 13% (n=11) serve other grades including preschool or transitional. Schools were asked to select all grade level categories they serve. More than half of charters surveyed (52%, n=45) selected more than one grade segment such as elementary and middle grades (n=22) or middle and high grades (n=8).

School enrollment of surveyed schools tended to be smaller than national averages with 18% (n=16) enrolling fewer than 100 students, 20% (n=17) enrolling 100-199, 39% (n=34) enrolling 200-499, 15% (n=13) enrolling 500-749, and only 8% (n=7) enrolling 750 or more students. The community breakdown showed 16% (n=14) located in rural communities, 17% (n=15) in towns, 26% (n=22) in suburban communities, and 40% (n=35) located in cities. 52% (n=45) of the schools surveyed said at least half their students qualify for free or reduced lunch, a measure of students’ socioeconomic status.

71% (n=62) of charter schools surveyed do not share facilities with another organization. Of the 25 schools that share facilities, 12 share with a nonprofit organization, 11 share with another educational facility, and 2 share with a business. When asked about partnerships 30 of the 85 schools that answered the question, (35%) reported that they have no partnerships with other organizations. Of the respondents, 55 schools have one or more partnerships with other schools, businesses, nonprofits, libraries, or other entities. The most common partnerships were with nonprofit organizations (n=32) and businesses (n=22). Only 7 charters reported partnering with a public library.