

## The State of Library Services in Sacramento County Public Schools

### Summary

A November 2016 California State Auditor's report found that "California has by far the poorest ratio of students to credentialed teacher-librarians in the nation." The 2017-2018 Grand Jury's review focused on whether this alarming ratio is true in Sacramento County, outlines the basic causes, and looks at the various ways that library services can be enhanced.

### Background

According to the 2016 California State Auditor's report, "California school districts reported employing only one teacher-librarian on average for every 7,414 students, for a total of 841 teacher-librarians statewide." This compares with other populous states such as New York, Texas, Florida and Illinois, all with a teacher-librarian employed for approximately every 1,500 students.

Credentialed teacher-librarians, referenced as 'librarians' through the remainder of this report, hold a teaching credential and have also completed specified curriculum in library science. In California, the number of teachers with active credentials authorizing them to provide library services has declined since fiscal year 2008–2009. In Sacramento County, many librarians in public school districts were laid off during this time frame as a result of the recession. Some were hired back later on; other vacancies were filled by non-credentialed library technicians, or not at all. Based on these trends, and the limited supply of librarians available in the marketplace, even school districts that are interested in hiring librarians may face difficulties in filling vacancies.

*California has, by far, the poorest ratio of students to credentialed Teacher-Librarians in the nation*

In 2010 the California State Board of Education (SBE) adopted the 'Model School Library Standards.' These standards recommend having one full-time librarian for every 785 students. This is ten times the current level of librarian staffing in California. Although the model standards describe a strong foundation as to what library services should include by grade level, the recommended criteria are not mandated for implementation. The

degree of librarian staffing for Sacramento County K-12 public school districts mirrors the statewide findings.

The school library plays an important role in preparing students to live and learn in a world of information. An American Association of School Librarians (AASL) publication (Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Programs), stressed the importance of libraries to enable students and staff to become effective users of ideas and information, by:

- Providing intellectual and physical access to materials in all formats,
- Providing instruction to foster competence and stimulate interest in reading, viewing, and using information and ideas, and
- Enabling educators to design learning strategies to meet the needs of individual students.

## Methodology

We researched relevant state laws as well as county materials related to library services functions in Sacramento County's K-12 public schools. We interviewed a Sacramento County of Education official, two K-12 school district superintendents, a high school principal, a high school librarian, and made a field visit to a shared Sacramento Public Library System and public-school district library. The grand jury interviewed a representative of an advocacy group, as well as a program manager from an organization that contracts with K-12 schools to provide reading services to students. The grand jury assessed current librarian and technician staffing in Sacramento County, and pursued secondary research through multiple websites, educational organizations and other resources to identify relevant local laws, requirements and trends.

## Discussion

Eighty four percent of K-12 public schools in California have a place designated as a library, although staffing, book or library collections, and programs range from exemplary to substandard (according to respondents of a contemporary California Department of Education survey). Of those, only approximately nine percent of California schools have a librarian on campus part time or longer.

In Sacramento County, the majority of librarians are found at the high school level, with fewer dedicated to the middle schools. Elementary schools are staffed by library technicians for a few hours per day.

The State Auditors report noted that California State law requires K-12 public school districts to provide library services to its students, although with little direction excepting general parameters and guidelines. Also, state and county agencies have little authority to monitor the provision of library services when performing their oversight responsibilities.

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Two major contributing factors that limit library services are clear: (1) California's per pupil spending lags the national average, 29<sup>th</sup> of 50 states, even though the cost of living is much higher than that of most other states. (2) California has turned over the control of state funding to

localities in recent years, eliminating mandated spending for dozens of categories. Under California's funding mechanism for year to year budgeting, Local Control and Accountability Plans (LCAP), K-12 school districts and individual schools can elect the degree that they wish to fund various curriculum and programs. This allows some programs to prevail over others based on perceived educational, community and political value, as well as current trends. The LCAP process yields a "zero-sum game" in terms of finite resources and competing interests.

In California, the following State and County organizations play a role in establishing requirements, recommendations or support for library services in Sacramento County K-12 public schools. The Federal government does not play a role in providing public school library service requirements. The responsibility for K-12 education rests with the states under the constitution.

- The California State Board of Education (SBE) adopted the 'Model School Library Standards for Public Schools, K-12,' in 2010. The model for library standards is one of a number of standards developed for various curriculums such as Math, English, etc. However, the model school library standards are not mandated for implementation by K-12 schools by the SBE, or by state law.
- The California Department of Education (CDE) surveys schools regarding school libraries, staffing and educational materials annually. With a completion rate of less than 50% every year since 2008-2009, the

survey does not assess the extent to which schools actually provide library services or implement the model library standards.

- The Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) has a role in disseminating information but does not enforce the model school library standards or a library plan on the local K-12 public school districts.

### Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP)

The recently implemented Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) puts decisions of the best use money at the local level. It has linked funding more closely to the demographics of a school district, allowing the school district more discretion on funding for programs and for students on an individual basis.

Under LCAP, each school district and charter school in California must have a three-year LCAP plan that is approved by the local school board and reviewed by their respective County Office of Education. There is a section included within the LCAP template specific to library services. Under "Implementation of State Standards," model school library standards are included along with ten other criteria in the areas of Math, English, History, etc. Positively, the LCAP plan must be developed in conjunction with stakeholders including employed school staff, parents/guardians, students, bargaining units, school board members, and community members.

### Sacramento County K-12 Public Library Staffing

As of 2016, Sacramento County employed fewer than 45 permanent full time civil service employees with the title of 'Librarian,' (Transparent California's website). With more than 240,000 full time students enrolled in Sacramento County, this represents a librarian to student ratio of about 1 to 5,500, and 1 librarian employed for every 8 Sacramento County K-12 public schools. It

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compares favorably with the California statewide ratio of 7,414 students per librarian (2016 California State Auditors Report), but not close to the U.S. national average of 1,109 students per librarian (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

Comparatively, 2010's "Model School Library Standards," recommends one, full time librarian for every 785 students. This would be nearly one full time librarian assigned for every public K-12 elementary, middle or high school in Sacramento County. Currently most of the librarians are assigned to high schools and middle schools. Only the four largest K-12 school districts appear to employ full time 'Librarians'. Most public-school libraries are served solely by 'library technicians'.

There are more than 170 civil service 'Library Technicians,' or 'Media Library Technicians' that support the K-12 public schools. They are providing library services for the elementary schools, as well as supporting the librarians at the high schools and middle schools. Most are part time and serve individual schools for less than 4 hours per day. Library technicians do not have the training to provide the breadth of services of librarians. If assigned only part time to an elementary school, the ability to fully service the student population further diminishes.

The 2017-2018 Sacramento County Grand Jury believes that limited funding and internal competing interests for that funding have created a declining or stagnant (at best) trend line for library services staffing that is not likely to change in the near future.

#### Examples from Two Sacramento County School Districts

Based on recent interviews with two K-12 school district Superintendents, competing interests with available funding through the LCFF formulas and LCAP are key to how resources are allocated across the breadth of school programs and salaried positions. Currently, only one district employs librarians at their high schools and middle schools. The second funds librarians at high schools only. Both Superintendents believe that they get the greatest value from librarians by assigning them to the high schools, as the research techniques that are taught at these grade levels are most valuable in this age range to help prepare students for college.

One Superintendent stated that it would be very difficult to justify the \$4 to \$5 million per year needed to staff middle and elementary schools with full time librarians. In addition, he also said that in his view, "in-classroom teachers are more valuable than librarians, as they represent direct touch points with the students, while librarians offer more of a peripheral support resource." Furthermore, as positions become available, he would choose to hire teachers, as opposed to librarians to meet the goal of better teacher to

student ratios. He mentioned that librarians were difficult to find during targeted hiring processes. In recent years, he also mentioned a greater need to hire professional staff to help immigrants (a rapidly growing student segment) with social and emotional needs necessary to assimilate culturally.

When asked, both Superintendents were aware of the Model School Library Standards but did not necessarily have an in depth understanding of the various elements. They were cognizant of the 2016 State of California Auditors report regarding the standards. One superintendent mentioned that his school district took the standards seriously, but that the recommendations were difficult to attain. However, each superintendent mentioned that they have staff that is knowledgeable regarding library services curriculum requirements and recommendations through various state and county agencies.

A librarian with a large Sacramento County school district said that with the growing role of the library technician, elementary school students have lost access to librarians that have the trained capacity to “teach and to be peers of the classroom teacher.”

She believes that the ability for the librarian to play a role in teaching elementary students to read, and to gain an appreciation of books has evaporated. She also said that individuals who are hired as library technicians are not academically equipped to teach students. Finally, she said that the turnover of library technicians in her school district was high. Most are hired as part time employees, not qualifying for benefits such as health insurance.

The librarian also pointed out that her school district did not employ a “District Librarian.” Without this leadership, she suggested that there was no instruction, administrative or social connection between the librarians at the high schools, and the library technicians serving independently at elementary schools.

### *The Role of Various Participants in Providing School Library Services*

Librarians in primary and secondary schools generally teach students how to use the library for research and to use its resources. In addition, they also help teachers identify resources to integrate with their lesson plans in the classroom. School librarians maintain reference services, organize media services and assist students and teachers in identifying

information as a group, or on an individual basis. Librarians also plan and coordinate library and instructional programs of the school district through collaboration with teachers.

Librarians provide a key role in guiding students on information literacy. Although information is abundant and easily accessible, it may not be easy to discern valid information from invalid. Librarians are also seen as resources for the best methods of research, an important college and career skill. Librarians are also available to work with classroom teachers to cross train, develop lesson plans and suggest relevant books and other materials.

Typically, librarians have a Bachelor's degree in any subject and a Master's degree in library science. In the State of California, there are three colleges that offer Library Science degrees accredited by the American Library Association (ALA), with five colleges offering library science degrees.

According to the California School Boards Association (CSBA), an advocacy group, many education policymakers don't actually know what good librarians do, so library programs are especially vulnerable to budget cuts when the state backs cash strapped schools into tight fiscal corners. "My fear is there are too

many teacher librarians disappearing," according to the president of the CSBA, who is also a teacher. "They are being replaced with paraprofessionals or volunteers, or they

*Studies confirm that school librarians and school libraries support students in academic achievement, lifelong learning, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and reading (AASL)*

are not being replaced at all and the libraries are closing." "We're at a tipping point where there are more administrators who are younger who have never worked in an environment where a teacher librarian has been. They don't know what they are missing."

Library Technicians help librarians acquire, prepare, and organize materials and help users to find those materials. Library technicians can work under the supervision of a librarian although they often work

independently. Technicians in small libraries handle a range of duties. Those in large libraries usually specialize.

Training requirements for library technicians vary widely, ranging from a high school diploma to specialized postsecondary training. Some employers only hire individuals who have library work experience or college training related to libraries while others train inexperienced workers on the job.

### Books and Media Resources

Based on the CDE's Online School Library Survey for 2013-14, the age of the library books is as important as the number of books available to students. The CDE notes on its website (Ed Facts - - School Libraries), that in 2013-14 the average copyright date of a California school library nonfiction book was 20 years old. The average copyright date is measured in the nonfiction section and includes both print and digital books. A Sacramento County K-12 Superintendent noted the importance of teachers and librarians keeping library resources up to date, and that "students are more likely to go to the internet for up to date information as opposed to accessing 15-year old library books."

A Sacramento County public school librarian stated that one of the greatest changes in the last 20 years for librarians has been the rise of the internet. Librarians in her school district are diligent in steering students to subscription services for internet research to better assure accuracy of accessed information.

Library resources, both print and electronic, are selected based on the best format for the intended user. The internet does not replace the need for books and often increases the demand for up-to-date library materials. In a school library today, many of the resources are aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS expect students to engage with a wide variety of informational and literary texts in English language arts/literacy. A public-school district librarian told the grand jury that books and media resources have become intertwined for students. "While many students are now using the internet for up to date non-fiction resources, they still appreciate having a book in their hands as a way of enjoying fiction. Books are not obsolete."

Ways to Enhance Library Services

Public Libraries

Joint Use of facilities - The Sacramento Public Library System and the Elk Grove Unified School District partnered to plan, build, support and use a library facility that serves the public as well as two schools, Franklin High School and Toby Johnson Middle School. The School District provides librarian services during the school day and the Sacramento Public Library system provides librarian services after school hours. The public benefits from expanded open library hours. The schools benefit from expanded resources, a greater selection of materials, and expanded after school hours.

In the town of Isleton, the public library is actually housed on the campus of Isleton Elementary School. During the school year, the library is available exclusively to the school during school hours, and then opens to the public in the afternoon. The library is staffed by a librarian from the Sacramento Public Library System, supplemented by volunteers. The public benefits from actually having a library site and the school benefits from having an established school library, staffed by a librarian, expanded resources and availability of after school hours.

School ID Cards used as Library Cards - Many school districts and public library systems allow students to use their school ID cards as library cards as well. Typically, students do not have to worry about late fees. Some systems will allow public library materials to be delivered to school libraries and returned there. The Sacramento Public Library system is starting to explore this concept with a large school district in Sacramento County. Additional benefits of this partnership are expected to include the ability for students to borrow e-books, access homework help and language-learning software.

Classroom field trips to public libraries – Provides an introduction to libraries, their programs and benefits and establishes a base for later usage.

## Contract Organizations

One innovative program available to Sacramento County elementary schools is run by Reading Partners. Reading Partners is a privately run, direct service that brings a “stand alone” reading program to participating schools. At chosen schools, Reading Partners houses a private library on site and provides a structured one-on-one reading program to students. Volunteers work with students selected by the school based on reading skill levels. In addition to housing the private library, students are given books to keep as they progress through some thirty tutoring sessions.

Schools apply to become a part of the program, and to be eligible a majority of the students enrolled at the schools must qualify for free/reduced lunch. Chosen schools pay a modest fee to Reading Partners to become enrolled in the program.

## Volunteerism

According to the CDE, public K-12 school library funding for more than 50% percent of California public school libraries comes from fund-raising activities (parent groups, book fairs, etc.). Although direct volunteerism may be impractical on a large-scale basis, given the nature and scope of required vetting and liability issues, Districts should consider some forms of volunteerism and funding from non-traditional sources.

For example, last year, the Friends of the Sacramento Public Library System started a program called Book First. The program provides a complimentary book to first graders in economically disadvantaged schools. These books are often the first book that some children may be able to call their own. Last year, 118 schools were visited, and more than 8,000 students participated in the program.

## Recommendations

The grand jury believes that the limited staffing levels of librarians in Sacramento County K-12 public schools are not likely to improve due to limited funding and competing priorities. This is expected to be particularly true for elementary schools, and to a lesser extent, middle schools.

We have pursued this review to inform the public of: (1) Recommendations for the breadth of library services and staffing for public K-12 schools in the state of California, (2) Examples of various entities that have provided enhanced library services beyond what's typical locally, and (3) How parents and students can be active in the LCAP process as well as with fundraising, to improve library services on behalf of their school or school district.

1. School Districts should adopt the recommendations of the 2010 Model School Library Standards to the fullest extent possible: The Model School Library Standards for California Public Schools (2010) are intended to provide students with "the skills and knowledge essential for students to be information literate." This includes the skills to "effectively access, evaluate, use, and integrate information into their lives" and to "apply responsible research practices." The standards also describe recommended educational standards for students at each grade level in addition to the level of library staffing and resources necessary for student achievement.
2. School Districts Should Collaborate with Public libraries: Districts should partner with Sacramento County's two public library systems, (the Sacramento Public Library System or the Folsom Public Library) to provide library services to schools within their district.
3. School Districts Should Review Use of Contract Organizations that Provide Library Services: Districts should continually identify and seek the supplementary support of Contract organizations for applicable services.
4. Districts Should Constantly Be Aware of Local Fund Raising and Volunteerism Opportunities: To the extent possible, School Districts should continue to make use of support and/or funding from private organizations and directly affected groups such as parents and students.

## Conclusion:

The ability to provide library services is problematic due to lack of funding. Innovation and creativity are necessary to address the current situation.

School Districts should continue to be open to new and innovative ways to allow volunteers to help with their time, talent, and/or funds. The LCAP process is an avenue to encourage local participation in the budgeting process of the school district or school. This mechanism may be a way to incubate new methods and means of volunteerism as well as procurement of outside funding.