

## **Discussion Paper: Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement**

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### **A. Introduction**

A Scholastic Research Foundation paper, "School Libraries Work!", published in 2004, notes that:

"School libraries are much more than books. They are a learning hub with a full range of print and electronic resources that support student achievement. The school library is a gathering place for people of all ages and interests to explore and debate ideas. The library media specialist, working collaboratively with all teachers, helps students develop a love of reading, become skilled users of ideas and information, and explore the world through print and electronic media resources."

"Direct correlation can be made between student achievement and school library programs led by library media specialists...."

"...research shows that a well-stocked library staffed by a certified library media specialist has a positive impact on student achievement, regardless of the socio-economic or educational levels of the community."

### **B. Background**

Although virtually all California schools have a place designated as a library, the staffing, collections and programs range from substandard to excellent. Only 15% of California schools have a credentialed library media teacher on campus part-time or more. In fact, California ranks 51<sup>st</sup> in the nation in library staffing ratios with a ratio of one library media teacher to every 4,451 students versus a national average of 1:856.

The number of library books per K-12 student in California is 13 versus a national recommendation of 16-25 books. The average copyright date of a California school library nonfiction book was 1990 in 2002 or 12 years old. The average number of hours that a California school library is open to students is 28 hours per week with 68% of school libraries open only during breaks.

In Pleasanton Unified School District, all of the schools, with the exception of Village High School, have a library. Only the two comprehensive high schools have a credentialed library media teacher on staff. Each of the middle school and elementary schools has one library assistant on staff. The number of hours each library is open varies by site.

The number of books per student in 2004 in PUSD school libraries ranged from 9.6 at Amador and Foothill to a high of 20.9 at Lydiksen Elementary. The average publication date of the fiction collections in PUSD libraries in 2004 ranged from 1984 (or 20 years old) at Amador High School to 1994 (10 years old) at Alisal and Hearst Elementary schools. The non-fiction

collections were approximately 10 years old at the elementary and middle schools and over 20 years old, on average at the high schools.

### **C. Defining a strong library program**

A 2001 study in Oregon which linked school libraries with improvements in student achievement, suggested that a strong and successful library is one:

- That is adequately staffed, stocked and funded
- Whose staff members are actively involved as leaders in their school's teaching and learning enterprise
- Whose staff provides access to and delivers materials and information that support the enterprise
- Whose staff has collegial, collaborative relationships with classroom teachers
- That embraces networked information technology.

A study by the New York State Educational Department in 2002 suggested that an effective school library:

- Is accessible to the total school community
- Is cost effective as one book is used by many
- Provides flexible scheduling and timely access to the collection by all students
- Offers a broad range of materials – reference, fiction and non-fiction
- Addresses a broad range of reading levels
- Minimizes loss through cost-effective tracking systems
- Supports learning to read and reading to learn with informational and imaginative text and literature
- Adds new resources throughout the school year to keep collections dynamic
- Creates a sense of ownership that is shared by the entire school community

The American Association of School Librarians defines the school librarian as:

“A teacher, instructional partner, information specialist, and program administrator... whose mission it is to ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information.”

This mission is accomplished 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.
- Working with other educators to design learning strategies to meet the needs of individual students.

Library media teachers guide students towards a lifelong love of learning and a deep appreciation of literature and reading. They promote intellectual access to information by preparing students to become productive citizens. They collaborate with the classroom teacher to increase the effectiveness of the instructional program and student learning. One of the key ways they accomplish this is through their lead role in teaching information literacy. Students must be taught to recognize that information is little more than random data until it is accessed, evaluated, organized and used to solve real life problems.

#### **D. Impact of school libraries on student achievement**

Numerous research studies conducted since 1990 have examined the relationship between effective school library programs and student achievement and have shown a strong, positive relationship. Highlights of some of these studies are included below:

- Students in Alaska’s secondary schools with full-time teacher-librarians were almost twice as likely as those without teacher-librarians to score average or above-average on California Achievement Tests (CAT5) and the more often students receive library/information literacy instruction from library media specialists, the higher the test scores.
- Elementary school students with the most collaborative teacher-librarians scored 21% higher on Colorado Student Assessment Program reading than students with the least collaborative teacher librarians.
- In Florida elementary schools where library programs are staffed 60 hours per week or more, there is a 9% improvement in test scores over those staffed less than 60 hours; for middle schools there was a 3.3% improvement and for high schools a 22.2% improvement.

- Iowa reading test scores rise with the development of school library programs. The relationship between library program development and test scores is not explained away by other school or community conditions at the elementary level.
- At the elementary and middle/junior high school levels, students score higher on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System test when there is a school library program.
- At elementary schools with the highest Michigan Educational Assessment Program reading scores, teachers and students are 4 times as likely to be able to visit the library on a flexibly scheduled basis, compared to their counterparts at the lowest scoring schools. These test scores rise with the extent to which the state's school library programs are headed by certified library media specialists.
- In Minnesota twice as many schools with above-average scores on grade 3, 5 and 8 reading tests had full-time library media specialists.
- New Mexico achievement test scores rise with the development of school library programs.
- Scores on standardized reading and English tests in North Carolina schools tended to increase when libraries in the schools had newer books, and were open and staffed more hours during the school week.
- 99.4% of Ohio students in grades 3-12 believe that school libraries and their services help them become better learners.
- Teacher-librarians from high schools with the best Oregon Statewide Assessment reading/language scores are twice as likely as their colleagues from the lowest scoring schools to plan collaboratively with classroom teachers, and their students are more than 3 times as likely to visit the library as part of a class or other group.
- Middle schools with the best Pennsylvania System of School Assessment reading scores spend twice as much on their school libraries as the lowest scoring schools.
- Over 10% more students in schools with librarians than in schools without librarians met minimum Texas Assessment of Academic Skills expectations in reading.
- The size of a library media center's staff and collection is the best school predictor of academic achievement.
- Research findings from more than 4,000 schools in more than a dozen U.S. states indicate links between academic achievement and strong school libraries as measured by library staffing levels, librarian activities, collection size, technology integration and library usage.

As a result of a recent large-scale study of school library effectiveness in Ohio conducted among more than 13,000 students and nearly 900 educators, it is recommended that:

- All school library programs provide instructional intervention, through a credentialed library media specialist, which centers on the development of information literacy skills for inquiry learning.
- All school libraries, including elementary schools, be staffed with credentialed library media specialists who have educational certification and who engage in collaborative instructional initiatives to help students learn and achieve.
- All library media specialists have a clearly defined role as information-learning specialist.
- All school libraries provide a learning-centered space supported by a strong technology infrastructure.
- All stakeholders engage in sustained and action-oriented discussions in the context of continuous improvement of the necessary resources, technology and staffing requirements needed to maximize the learning opportunities through school libraries.

## **RESOURCE LIST: SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

California Department of Education, "Statistics about California School Libraries".

[www.cde.ca.gov/library/libstats.html](http://www.cde.ca.gov/library/libstats.html)

California School Library Association, "California Standards for Information Literacy: Grades K-12 (DRAFT)". <http://www.schoollibrary.org/>

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