

Policy Brief: Impact of School Librarians on Students and the Educational Ecosystem

Prepared by EveryLibrary
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Introduction

As we enter the third school year impacted by the pandemic, the flexible and multi-faceted role of a school librarian is more important than ever. School librarians serve as instructional technology support to both teachers, students, and their families, regardless of the learning environment. As Delaware policymakers consider ways to integrate more school librarians into their schools, EveryLibrary has prepared this briefing to provide elected officials with national insights into the role and impact of school librarians with a historic view into Delaware’s previous conversations about school libraries.

National School Library Studies

More than 60 state-level library impact studies have been conducted in 26 states over the past two decades. In “Why school librarians matter: What years of research tell us” authors Keith Curry Lance and Deb Kachel have synthesized the studies and concluded that quality school library programs result in higher student achievement, graduation rates, and mastery of academic standards. These benefits are more pronounced for at-risk students, including students of color, students from low-income households, and students with disabilities. In a Pennsylvania study, nearly 8% more students scored Advanced on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment in reading in schools with a full-time, certified librarian than in schools without.

The effect of library staffing on writing scores was even greater: Students with full-time librarians were almost *three times* more likely than those without librarians to have Advanced writing scores. On average, Black and Latino students whose schools had larger library collections (versus those who did not) more than doubled their percentages of Advanced writing scores and cut their risk of Below Basic writing scores in half. In a 2015 Washington state study, the presence of a certified school librarian was also a

predictor of higher elementary and middle school math scores. While all of these studies emphasize the need for certified school librarians, staffing is only part of the solution. In order to ensure an effective school library program, budgeting and resources, scheduling, and support personnel must also be considered.

State of School Libraries in Delaware

The demographics of Delaware schools are changing. According to the Delaware Department of Education's 2020 "[Delaware report card: Educational data for Delaware citizens](#)", students of color represent over half of the overall student population in Delaware. Since 2011, the Hispanic/Latinx student population has increased by 48 percent. African American and other minority populations have also increased since 2011, where the White student population has steadily decreased since 2011. The students with disabilities population has increased by 26 percent and the English learner population has increased by 92 percent, despite only a 6 percent enrollment in total public school students. Charter enrollment has increased by 64 percent since 2011. In the 2020-2021 school year, Delaware had 23 public charter schools, serving nearly 17,000 students. Currently, only a single charter school (Newark Charter School) employs a school librarian, down from 6 librarians in charter schools in 2015.

[Section 1580 of the Delaware Administrative Code](#) addresses School Library Media Specialists and outlines current requirements to obtain licensure as a School Library Media Specialist for K-12 public schools in the state of Delaware. In order to serve as a school librarian in the state of Delaware, one must either earn a master's or doctoral degree from a Regionally Accredited college or university in school library media from an American Library Association-approved program or earned a master's or doctoral degree from a Regionally Accredited college or university in any area and completed a Department-approved school library media program that meets the American Library Association standards. In 2016, 82 percent of school librarians were certified in the state of Delaware.

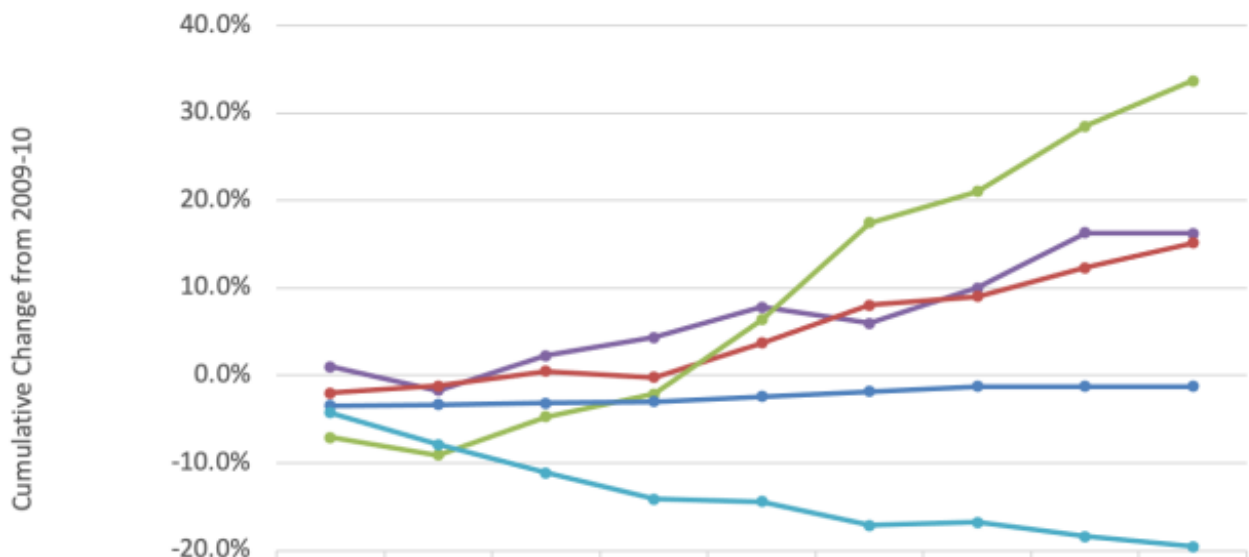
According to [Requirements for school librarian employment: A state-by-state summary](#), a 2021 national survey of state laws and regulations concerning school librarians, Delaware is among the 23 states where there is no legislation or regulation mandating or requiring school libraries in Delaware. Exemplar states that do require a school librarian include Alabama which funds certified school librarians in all schools,

the District of Columbia which recently fully-funded a certified school librarian position in every school, Kentucky which “requires the employment of a certified school media librarian to be assigned to each school to organize, equip, and manage the operations of the school library”, and Maryland which requires each school system to establish a library program run by certified school media personnel for all students.

Re-Engaging the 2016 Master Plan for School Libraries in Delaware

As reported in the 2021’s “*Perspectives on school librarian employment in the United States, 2009-10 to 2018-19*” Delaware has experienced a 24.8% reduction in FTE school librarians since 2008-2009. This is compared to an overall national reduction of 19.5% . While most school librarian reductions in Delaware were listed as being due to budgetary reasons, it is important to note that district administrator, school administrator, and instructional coordinator positions in Delaware have had substantial increases over the past decade.

Change Since 2009-10 in Selected Educator FTEs, United States, 2010-11 to 2018-19



	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
District Administrators	1.0%	-1.7%	2.3%	4.3%	7.8%	6.0%	10.0%	16.3%	16.3%
School Administrators	-2.0%	-1.2%	0.5%	-0.2%	3.7%	8.0%	9.0%	12.3%	15.1%
Instructional Coordinators	-7.1%	-9.1%	-4.7%	-2.1%	6.4%	17.4%	21.0%	28.5%	33.7%
Teachers	-3.4%	-3.3%	-3.1%	-3.0%	-2.4%	-1.8%	-1.3%	-1.2%	-1.2%
School Librarians	-4.3%	-7.9%	-11.2%	-14.2%	-14.4%	-17.2%	-16.8%	-18.4%	-19.5%

School Year

Since 2016, the state of Delaware has had a Master Plan for school libraries, but it has not yet begun to be implemented. “[Delaware school libraries master plan](#): Quality school libraries = higher student achievement” is an exhaustive report that examines historical trends in school library staffing, funding, and access to resources in Delaware schools. Highlighting the dire state of school libraries in Delaware, this report offers ten key recommendations for improving the status of school libraries in the state, with the ultimate goal of higher student achievement:

1. Require a school library, a certified librarian, and an appropriate level of support staff in every school.
2. Seek funding for and implement a pilot project in nine schools to determine the impact that quality school libraries have on student learning outcomes.
3. Expand student access to “E-Content.”
4. Expand the Delaware Library Consortium to include all school libraries.
5. Establish specific governance responsibilities for coordination and oversight of school libraries.
6. Examine and address systematic issues that inhibit the development of high-quality school library programs.
7. Leverage Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) funding to strengthen school libraries.
8. Implement flexible scheduling for school libraries.
9. Design and implement an ongoing program of data collection, management, and assessment of school libraries.
10. Create a Delaware School Library quality index to facilitate the tracking of student performance and investment in school library services.

The 2016 Master Plan references a [previous state-level study](#) conducted in 2004 by Dr. Ross J. Todd. The 2004 report claims, “Delaware has the potential to be identified nationally as one of the first states to achieve high quality school library services and programs and to reach state-based and nationally determined standards.” Unfortunately, neither the recommendations of the 2004 report nor the 2016 Master Plan were implemented. Not only has Delaware been unable to achieve these educational aspirations, but the status of school libraries has also steadily declined.

Since Todd’s 2004 report and as noted previously, school librarian positions have decreased by over 25%, with Delaware faring worse than the national state average. What is more alarming is *where* these position reductions occurred. Delaware districts serving more than 40% of students from low-income households had a 24% *decrease* in librarian positions, where more affluent districts serving less than 40% of students

from low-income households saw an 18% *increase* in librarian positions. This shift in school librarian staffing contradicts research supporting the impact school librarians have in communities with higher needs. At five years beyond the date of publication, the majority of the goals included in the Master Plan have yet to be implemented

Extended Bibliography:

School Librarians Positive Impact on Media & Information Literacy

Wineburg, Sam and McGrew, Sarah and Breakstone, Joel and Ortega, Teresa. (2016). *Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning*. Stanford Digital Repository. Available at: <http://purl.stanford.edu/fv751yt5934>

This 2016 study highlights the lack of information literacy skills for middle school, high school, and college students. The survey found that 82% of middle schoolers couldn't tell the difference between sponsored articles and real news stories. In one example, more than 30 percent of high schoolers identified a fake post claiming to be from Fox News as more reliable than a post legitimately from Fox News. Fully 80 percent of the Stanford college students surveyed could not identify biased content from independent news sources.

Rideout, V., & Robb, M. B. (2020). *The Common Sense census: Media use by kids age zero to eight, 2020*. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media.

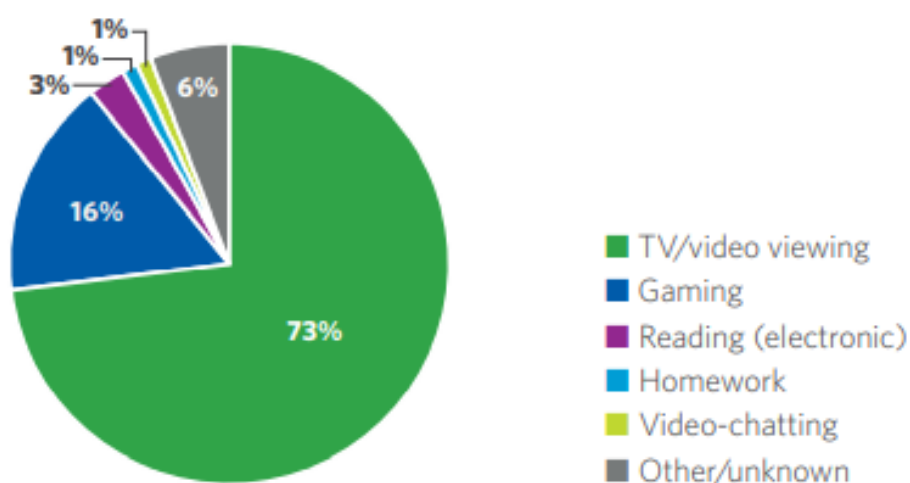
Common Sense Media is an independent, non-profit whose mission is to provide parents, educators, health organizations, and policymakers with reliable, independent data on children's use of media and technology and the impact it has on their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. This "Zero to Eight" study is the only nationally representative study which tracks the amount and type of media usage of kids from birth to 8 years old. Data reflected in this report was collected prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, researchers presume the trends can only be extrapolated given the reliance on technology for digital learning.

Nearly half of 2- to 4-year olds and more than two-thirds of 5- to 8-year olds have their own tablet or smartphone. On average, children from birth to age 8 use about two and a half hours of screen media a

day. Children in low-income households are spending nearly two hours more with screens than children from higher-income households. The difference is also pronounced among Black and Hispanic/Latinx families compared to white families. 18 percent of 0 to 8 year olds are searching for/viewing content without the guidance of an adult.

FIGURE A. Screen Use, by Activity, 2020

Among 0- to 8-year-olds, proportion of average daily screen time devoted to ...



School Librarians and Social-Emotional Learning

CASEL, the definitive source on social and emotional learning, defines SEL as “the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.” More than two decades of research indicates that social and emotional learning improves student achievement by an average of 11 percentage points. Further, SEL programs can improve student attitudes toward

school, reduce depression and stress, and increase behaviors such as kindness, sharing, and empathy. These studies indicate that these advantages have lasting benefits of up to 18 years, helping students well into adulthood.

On January 28, 2020, the Delaware Department of Education released an initial draft of the Delaware Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies. Modeled from the CASEL competencies, Delaware has adopted the following competency areas:

1. Self-Awareness
2. Self-Management
3. Social Awareness
4. Relationship Skills
5. Responsible Decision-Making

School librarians are in a position to lead the SEL efforts in Delaware due to their school-wide reach and collaboration with other educators. Through collaborative lessons that foster problem solving and self-reflection, coupled with a well-curated library collection of diverse perspectives and empathy-building titles, school librarians can facilitate the expansion of SEL throughout the school.

School Librarians and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Goals

In June of 2020, Governor Carney and Department of Education Secretary Bunting announced the creation of the Office of Equity and Innovation. Despite any funding, the office has identified initial goals of diversifying the educator workforce and supporting schools in addressing and eliminating the racial inequities that exist. According to the 2021 Delaware Report Card, 58% of students in Delaware identified as a race or ethnicity other than White or Caucasian.

School librarians are champions for social justice, as they model and develop a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion for all races, religions, and socio-economic statuses. Beyond curating diverse resources, school librarians facilitate professional learning to other educators to create an inclusive and welcome school environment. Librarians are experts in the location, evaluation, and curation of books that allow students to “see” themselves in the stories.

School Librarians During COVID / Accelerated Learning

According to a national representative study, in nearly a fifth of districts surveyed, the instruction students received in spring 2020 was designed not to teach new skills and understanding, but to review what had already been taught. A study by McKinsey & Company found that by fall of 2020 students learned only 67 percent of the math and 87 percent of the reading that grade-level peers would typically have learned. The US Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights published “Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America’s Students”, highlighting 11 key findings on the impacts of COVID-19 on the students in elementary, secondary, and higher education institutions. While this report notes the emerging evidence that the pandemic has negatively affected academic growth for all students, it highlights the even greater negative impacts placed on students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities.

School librarians not only continue to meet the needs of learners in a virtual environment, but they are also leaders in their schools and districts, enabling and facilitating educator and administrator needs in the shifting landscape (AASL 2020). School librarians are:

- Offering resource curation and technology tools for “classroom” instruction (includes suggesting titles/resources): 84.94%
- Providing virtual assistance (online, phone, etc.): 81.11%
- Expanding online resources, including expansion of resources and materials on school website(s): 79.75%
- Facilitating virtual meetings/collaborative events/professional development: 77.53%
- Providing technology support (setting up and using online resources/tools, tutorials, etc.): 71.98%
- Answering intellectual freedom/fair-use questions: 58.40%
- Co-teaching with classroom or subject expert educators: 36.54%

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