

**New York State's School Libraries and Library Media Specialists:
An Impact Study**

Preliminary Report

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1.0 Introduction

Previous state studies of school libraries' services and resources have focused almost exclusively on the school library media center's impact on student achievement, certainly a basic and critical focus. However, there is a need to look beyond achievement test scores to investigate additional factors such as the impact on (1) student *motivation* for learning, (2) *students with disabilities*, (3) *technology* use for teaching and learning, and (4) *families and communities*.

This study, funded by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum & Library Services, uses multiple research methods to investigate the impact of school library programs, services, and resources in each of the above areas. Results are expected to provide guidance for effective school library programs and services and increase our understanding of the complex and multiple ways in which school libraries influence and motivate student learning. This study has received human subjects approval from the Institutional Review Board at Syracuse University, as well as the participating school districts including the Office of Accountability, New York City Department of Education.

1.1 Study Components

This research study is divided into three phases:

Phase 1: Fall 2006-Fall 2007 (completed as of 1/1/08)

A general, electronic survey was distributed to library media specialists (LMS) and building principals in all 4,293 public schools in New York State. The LMS general survey focused on work climate, student motivation, LMS leadership, information literacy skills instruction, collaboration with classroom teachers, and diversity of collection.

Phase 2: Fall 2007-Winter 2008 (in progress)

An in-depth survey was distributed to public school library media specialists, 4th, 8th, and 11th grade teachers, and 5th, 8th, and 11th grade students in 48 schools in New York State. These levels represent elementary, middle, and high school levels. Focus groups with LMSs, teachers, and students and interviews with building principals will be conducted in January-February 2008.

Phase 3: Spring 2008-Fall 2008

An ethnographic (comparative case) study in two public school libraries in New York State will be conducted in 2008. This study will focus on services and resources to students with disabilities.

1.2 Research Questions

During this multi-phase, two year study a combination of qualitative and quantitative data will be collected in order to address the following research questions (emphasis in bold):

- What factors, related to school library programs, services and resources, impact New York State students' **learning achievement**?
- How do New York State school library services and programs affect student **motivation for learning**?
- What and how do New York State school library media centers/specialists provide **services and resources to students with disabilities**?
- In what ways do school library media specialists influence the **use of technology** by both students and teachers and what is the subsequent impact on teaching and learning?
- What, if any, effects do school library services, programs, and resources have on **families and communities**?

1.3 Instruments

A general, online survey, consisting of 12 categories (work climate and learning atmosphere, facilities, collections, student motivation and learning, and roles of the LMS) with a total of 69 items, was developed, pilot tested, validated, and implemented with New York State's library media specialists (a similar instrument was developed for building principals). An additional 24 items focused on demographics for the LMS and the library. At the end of the survey, an optional "comments" section was included. While LMS data collection is complete, principal surveys are still being collected. We expect all data to be collected by January 2008,

An in-depth, online survey allowed us to dig more deeply into areas touched on by the general survey. In-depth surveys were developed for LMS, classroom teachers in grades 4, 8, and 11, and students in grades 5, 8, and 11. Areas covered across instruments include information literacy skills instruction (specifically, finding, using and evaluating information), technology use, diversity, and learning motivation. Other areas included in the LMS and classroom teacher surveys are curricular and instructional collaboration, diversity, and professional development activities. In addition, all of the instruments include a "critical incident technique" item that asks the respondent to recall and describe a memorable incident in the school library. Data collection for in-depth surveys will be completed by January 2008.

Focus group protocols have been developed and are in the process of being pilot tested. These protocols are more focused than either of the surveys, targeting student learning and motivation for learning, technology use, services for students with

disabilities, and outreach. Focus groups will be held with LMS, classroom teachers, parents, and students in 24 schools (selected from those participating in the in-depth surveys) statewide.

2.0 Preliminary Results

While data continues to be collected and analyzed, some preliminary findings can be reported.

2.1 Phase 1- Findings to Date

General survey responses from library media specialists totaled 1612 (38.5%) of the total population of school LMS statewide, including 31% of New York City’s public school librarians. The data are approximately representative of New York State’s needs/resource categories (see Table 1). Data were received from LMS in every county in New York State.

N/R/C	NYS %*	Sample % (#)
1	28.6	24.9 (402)
2	4.8	2.8 (45)
3	8.3	7.6 (122)
4	9.7	12.0 (194)
5	33.8	40.1 (646)
6	14.7	12.6 (203)
7	n/a	n/a

Table 1. Percentage of Schools by New York State’s Needs/Resource Categories Compared with Percentage of Survey Respondents.

[*http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/repcrd2004/information/similar-schools/guide.shtml](http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/repcrd2004/information/similar-schools/guide.shtml)

In addition, the sample represents library media specialists from elementary and secondary (middle and high) schools, as well as others such as K-12 schools, statewide. A majority of those responding were state certified. The 12.5% of non-certified LMSs responding were at the elementary level (see Table 2).

Grade level	
Elementary	49.3
Secondary	42.7
Other (K-12)	8.0
LMS Certification	
NYS Certified	87.5
Non NYS Certified	12.5

Table 2. Percentage of General Survey LMS Respondents by Building Level and Certification.

To date, general survey data from building principals in New York State total 562 (13%) of the total population. Surveys are continuing to be collected from this population.

Several correlations have been conducted on the general survey data. The following preliminary results are reported.

Importance of Certified Elementary School library Media Specialists

New York State does not currently mandate certified school library media specialists at the elementary level. In some school districts, these positions are filled with untrained people (e.g., cluster teachers, library aides). Therefore, an important research question would be: Does having a certified LMS at the elementary level makes a difference in student learning?

A one-way analysis of covariance revealed that in elementary schools with a certified (vs. non-certified) library media specialist, students have significantly higher achievement scores on the 4th grade ELA test. Additional analyses discovered a significant positive relationship between:

- Certified LMS and the selection of materials for the school's library collection that represent different points of view.
- Certified LMS and the selection of materials for the school's library collection that support the school's curriculum.

Library media specialists have an important role to play regarding the use of technology to support teaching and learning in their schools. Below are some examples of ways in which they are fulfilling this role.

- 74% of respondents provide guidance to students in the use of digital resources at least once a week.
- 57% of respondents assist students in using information in a variety of media formats (books, CDs, DVDs, etc) at least once a week.
- 65% of respondents assist staff in using information in a variety of media formats (books, CDs, DVDs, etc) at least once a week.
- 46.1% the schools surveyed provide students with access to the library catalogue from home.
- 91% of the schools surveyed have an automated circulation system.

The general survey allowed respondents to make comments and many did. Comments revealed a pride in the work LMS do, active involvement in the education of students

(including enrichment and extended day programs), support for classroom teaching and the curriculum, and a range of services to families and their communities. Here are just a few of these comments:

- We have a great program that assists our students and teachers in any way we can. We also have a great group of volunteers who come in on a regular basis. Our parents know they are always welcome to visit us and we will assist them in any way we can.
- We are proud of our library media center. From not being a part of the school, it has evolved into one of the most integral parts of the school. This is due in large part to the library Web site, newsletter, and newly becoming a member of the school's leadership team...
- The media center is always in use and many resources are available 24/7 via a virtual classroom, discussion boards, wikis, blogs, and Web pages and any format (current or future) conducive to learning with almost unlimited access and two-way communication (asynchronous and synchronous).
- Our program is a semi flexible schedule - we meet every 2 weeks for scheduled classes and the rest of the time is flexible including teaming with classroom teachers, and reading groups and clubs for enrichment.
- Our school had an extended after school library program that was funded by a grant. The program was well received and another grant was successfully applied for. The after-school library program will be starting in the fall of next year.
- Our library has open access for our whole learning community throughout the day. Our extended day program is open to all grade levels. K, 1, and 2 visit with parents one day a week.
- I see every day the impact of a strong librarian in a school with 97% free lunch and 25% of students w/IEP's. It is rewarding to see students eagerly reading books, recommending them, writing out book reviews, and giving recommendations for the next order...
- Students in this school make use of this library on a regular basis because many of our children do not go to the public library in the neighborhood (due to) limited opening of the public library. Many parents work and don't have the time to take their children to the public library as well.

At the same time, some LMS expressed frustration with the barriers that prevent them from providing the level and types of services they could offer. These barriers are most often due to inadequate funding and include such issues as (1) being part-time, (2) being split between anywhere from two to five schools and not being able to provide adequate services to any of them, (3) dilapidated, inadequate facilities, (4) outdated collections, (5) lack of technology, (6) takeover of library space for non-library functions requiring library programs and services to cease, and (7) elimination of library assistant positions. A few such comments appear below:

with. She helped me first think of a poem. I was lost for words. (Our LMS) took me aside to remove me from an distractions. She sat down next to me and helped me. I finished my project and was proud of it. Part of the project was to write more poems. Because of the few minutes (my LMS) helped me I was able to write 10 other poems by myself. I was proud and have her to thank. I like the fact that I didn't have to ask for help. She noticed herself that I was struggling and took the time to work with me. I appreciate her for this.

Learning Support

- Last year we were assigned a project in health about a disease. We got to pick our own topic and find information about it in the library. My librarian helped me get information out of books and off the internet. She showed us different websites like WebMd and other medically based websites. In our library, there's a section that contains books on health. I thought it was pretty easy finding information with the help of our school librarian. Thanks to her help, I got a 100 on my project.
- In grade 10, we had to do a Supreme Court case research project. She helped me find information throughout the Internet and also books in our library and surrounding libraries. She helped with out to use the information appropriately and how to cite it correctly. Without my librarian's help, I would not have received the good grade that I did on the project.
- I come in the library all the time in my study halls just to do work and sometimes just to relax and read. It is always a friendly environment and is a quiet place for students to work. One time I was doing a research project and my librarian helped me a lot because on my own I couldn't find any information. She looked for books and gave them to me to help me, and she even gave me some websites that would help me. After this, I learned not all websites are accurate, and I now find it much easier for me to find information and do research papers. I was very happy and appreciative after this, because if it wasn't for her, I don't know what I would have done.
- My English teacher had assigned me and my partner to do a research project. My teacher had told us that we needed to create a power point presentation that would satisfy the requirements that he had given us. As me and my partner began to research our topic we had the idea to put a video of an interview with a leading scientist in this field. The only problem was we did not know how to upload a video onto our PowerPoint. After spending a few minutes trying to figure it out by ourselves, my partner and I decided it was time to ask for some assistance. My librarian came over to us and we explained to her what our problem was, after hearing us she sat down next to us and told us what we needed to do to upload a video onto our power point. She gave us step by step instructions on how to upload the video and then put it into a slid that was already created on our power point presentation. The experience that me and my partner had that very day was one that lead to my partner and I getting a 100 on the project. I am thankful I guess you could say to the librarian for taking her time and explaining the steps of this process, but at the same time it was simply her job so I do not think much of it.

evaluate websites as we go along, and they learn that all sites are not equal. These students are versed in the use of search engines such as Google but have no discrimination, and no tools to determine a "good site." I purposely include sites that are not well organized, have no information about their creator or author, or have editing errors so they can see the comparison with quality websites. Also, the websites are all accessed from the library webpage, so they learn early in their Junior High career that the library webpage has resources for them.

- Collaborating with a Youth Services librarian from the public library, we went to each of our four feeder schools to talk with the 5th grade classes about reading and books, and provide information about the Read and Share program and the public library's Summer Reading program. I set up an online discussion board within a safe, school-sanctioned environment, so that students could discuss the books they read during the summer. The local bus company, TCAT, provided free bus passes to every student, with information on how to obtain more if needed, so that they could get to the public library with their families. Through an anonymous donor, I was able to purchase enough paperback books with varied subjects and reading levels so that every student could choose one to take home on the last day of school. We met for a pizza party at the public library in July, and again at DeWitt MS library in August.

Technology Use

- In 2006/2007 I received a Teacher's Center Enabling Grant to conduct a collaborative project with both 4th grade teachers. The project was called the Voices of New York State: Podcasting in a K-5 classroom. Students needed to complete a classroom unit on NYS; we set up a collaborative project aligned with NYS and NETS Standards. The project began with extensive brainstorming, self-selection of topics, selection of various tools and resources necessary for the project. Students were supported during the research process and given the opportunity to express their final project through the creation of team-Podcasts. They then recorded their scripts, selected their music and created their works of art. Students were pretty psyched up by the project and gave up their lunches and recesses in order to finish up their PodCasts. I felt very good about the project and the quality of the student work. The collaborating teachers learned a great deal about the research process, about motivation of students and also about the newish technology of PodCasting. The project was then entered into our local BOCES' Media Festival; awards were given and additional recognition received by students.
- Every year the science research class students visit the library on a regular basis to conduct research on their various topics. This year one student selected "Global Warming and Malaria". These students need to access full-text journal articles to augment their research. Some think that using search engines such as Yahoo! or Google are acceptable methods of researching. I enlighten them to the wonderful database resources we subscribe to. Those that had been unaware of the capability of the databases are thrilled to use them.

Classroom Teacher Comments

Classroom teachers have provided rich and detailed accounts of ways in which their school library media specialists offer programs, services and resources to benefit them

This final example reflects the breadth and importance of support library media specialists provide to teachers and their students.

- It would be difficult for me to name one specific time that our librarian helped/or excited my students about learning something new in our school library. She encourages each and every child to read in many different ways. Our librarian works in close contact with our team and ties in our curriculum with tools from our library. She makes it all very meaningful and relevant. She teams with us on projects ranging from using Microsoft Word to all the children to type poetry, to using the Internet to research inventors and include illustrations to go along with them, to creating bookmarks and other various creative activities for students to share books/book reports, to using books and computers to introduce them to different genres of literature and different authors. Not only do our students have the opportunity to research and learn about these authors in depth, then our librarian invites the authors into our school and the students have the opportunity to meet and talk to these author's (mostly from around NY State which is even more meaningful) which truly inspires each and every child. Our librarian does so much for me, my students and our school... we'd be lost without her.