

School Library Impact Studies Summarized

Quality school library programs impact student achievement. Since the 1990's when standardized tests became a major indicator of student learning, numerous studies have been conducted to confirm the educational gains that school library programs provide in student learning. The most universal finding is the presence of full-time, certified school librarians and appropriate support staff who implement a quality, school-integrated program of library services. It has been shown that incremental increases in the following can result in incremental gains in student learning:

- increased hours of access for both individual student visits and group visits by classes;
- larger collections of print and electronic resources with access at school and from home;
- up-to-date technology with connectivity to databases and automated collections;
- instruction implemented in collaboration with teachers that is integrated with classroom curriculum and allows students to learn and practice such 21st century skills as problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication of ideas and information;
- increased student usage of school library services;
- higher total library expenditures; and
- leadership activities by the librarian in providing professional development for teachers, serving on key committees, and meeting regularly with the principal.

A body of research known as the “school library impact studies” that includes twenty-two states and one Canadian province confirms these basic findings. While most studies examined student standardized tests scores, other studies utilized different qualitative approaches or a combination of methods. 21 studies surveyed school librarians and also correlated standardized test scores with school library program components (Alaska 2000, California 2008, Colorado 1993, 2000, 2010, Florida 2003, Illinois 2005, Indiana 2007, Iowa 2002, Massachusetts 2000, Michigan 2003, Minnesota 2002 & 2004, Missouri 2003, New Mexico 2002, North Carolina 2003, Ontario 2006, Oregon 2000, Pennsylvania 2000, Texas 2001, and Wisconsin 2006). Nine studies surveyed students, teachers, and school administrators about their perceptions of the impact of school libraries on learning (Delaware 2004-05, Idaho 2009, Indiana 2007, Michigan 2003, New Jersey 2009, New York 2009-10, Ohio 2004, Ontario 2009, and Wisconsin 2006). Four compared the status of school library programs to the state's school library guidelines to determine how closely programs matched recommendations (Delaware 2004-05, Minnesota 2002 & 2004, and Texas 2001).

The studies that examined standardized test data also factored in school and community differences. School factors generally included expenditures per pupil, teacher per pupil ratio, average years of experience of classroom teachers and average salaries. Community differences generally included educational attainment of adults in the community, children in poverty, and racial ethnic demographics. Although the effects of poverty still remain a primary force in determining student academic success, state after state showed that such socio-economic conditions could not explain away the impact of school library programs, especially school library staffing, funding, and quality collections. For example, the 2009 Texas study showed that at the elementary school level, socio-economic variables explained 26 percent of the variance; at the middle/junior high school level they explained 44 percent; and at the high school level they explained 55 percent. Library variables explained a smaller but still very significant portion of the variance in the Texas standardized test performance. They explained approximately four percent of the variance in test performance at the elementary and middle/junior high school levels and 8.2 percent at the high school level. The Wisconsin study of 2006 found that at the

high school level the impact of a robust library media program was almost seven percentage points greater than the impact of the socio-economic variables. In the 2009 California study, when considering school and community variables, school library programs accounted for between 19% and 21% of the variance in STAR test scores. On the English Language Arts test, the library program was a stronger predictor of success than the other school variables. On the U.S. History test, the library program was, in fact, the best predictor of student performance—better than other school variables and better than community variables including parent education and poverty levels.

Clearly, the studies confirm that quality school library programs with full-time, certified librarians and library support staff are indicative of and critical to student achievement. In fact, quality school library programs may play an even greater role in providing academic support to those students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In closing the achievement gap and assuring that all students are prepared with the 21st century skills they need to succeed, school leaders and librarians need to embrace this body of research and foster school library programs that can make a difference in student learning. Schools that support their library programs give their students a better chance to succeed.

The Pennsylvania Study of 1999-2000

The Pennsylvania study entitled [*Measuring Up to Standards: The Impact of School Library Programs and Information Literacy in Pennsylvania Schools*](#), was conducted by Keith Curry Lance with Marcia J. Rodney and Christine Hamilton-Pennell. With 435 participating school libraries, the study examined the following characteristics: 1) hours of the school library; 2) school library staff; 3) paid staff activities; 4) usage of school library services; 5) school library technology; 6) school library resources; 7) annual operating expenditures for the school library; and 8) school library information management. PSSA reading test scores from the 1998-99 academic year for 5th, 8th, and 11th graders were also examined for the schools in relation to school library characteristics.

The results of the Pennsylvania study found that PSSA reading scores linked directly to school library staffing, information technology, and integrating information literacy in instruction. In fact, PSSA scores improved with increases in school librarian staff hours and support staff hours. Higher scores also were present where networked computers enabled students and staff to utilize the ACCESS PA database, the Internet, and licensed databases. The “keystone” finding was the importance of teaching information literacy as an integral part of standards and classroom curriculum. Test scores increased as librarians spent more time teaching cooperatively with teachers, teaching information literacy skills independently, providing in-service training to teachers, serving on standards and curriculum committees, and managing information technology. These predictors of academic achievement could not be explained away by the aforementioned school and community differences which were also examined.

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