The Future of Delaware School Libraries
A Summary of the School Libraries Master Plan

August 2017

This policy brief by the Institute for Public Administration was prepared for the Partnership for Public Education and summarizes the key findings and recommendations of the Delaware School Libraries Master Plan. The Master Plan examines years of scholarly research that cites the linkage between quality school libraries and student success. Student success refers to higher reading and writing tests scores, increased literacy skills, and higher graduation rates. The Master Plan addresses the disparities between the impact school libraries could have and the impact they are currently having in the state. The Master Plan concludes by examining the state of Delaware school libraries and making recommendations on how Delaware can maximize the positive effects school libraries can have on the students in the state.

A Look at School Libraries Nationally

A well-educated population is vital to America's workforce, but only 37 percent of high school graduates across the nation are deemed "college-ready" (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2015). More than 60 studies conducted over two decades show school libraries can have a positive impact on student learning outcomes (Gretes, 2013).

Specifically, a South Carolina study discovered that the presence of a certified librarian positively affected English Language Arts test scores as well as the development of research and writing skills (Lance, Rodney, and Schwarz, 2014). Research such as this emphasizes the importance of a full-time certified librarian. However, other assets of a quality library also lead to student success. A 2012 study in Pennsylvania found that schools with quality libraries were two-to-five times more likely to have students receive an "advanced" score on the state's standardized writing test than ones that did not (Lance and Schwarz, 2012). In addition, a study titled *Certified Teacher Librarians, Library Quality and Student Achievement in Washington State Public Schools* ranked school libraries using a library quality scale (LQS), which took into account factors such as staffing, collection, and scheduling. The study found that schools with libraries that scored higher on the LQS had higher graduation rates (Coker, 2015).

The Current State of Delaware School Libraries

After reviewing relevant literature, the Delaware School Libraries Master Plan team found that a quality school library requires:

- A full-time certified/qualified librarian at the building level.

- Adequate support staff[1] to enable the librarian to perform professional duties such

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1 Delaware School Libraries Master Plan defines this as the following: 0.5 FTE for 300-999 students; 1.0 FTE for 1,000- 1,599 students; 2.0 FTE for 1,600 or more students.

as developing and managing educational programs, enhancing collaborative teaching practices, collection development, teaching information and reading literacy, and serving as an educational resource for school staff and students.

- Adequate expenditures for new resources to ensure student access to recent, relevant content.

- High level of collaboration between librarians and teachers as well as librarians and students.

- Flexible scheduling that enables the librarian to interact with teachers and students.

- Access to up-to-date technological infrastructure and online resources.

- Access to professional development and networking opportunities for library staff.

Currently, many school libraries in Delaware are missing some of these characteristics. Data gleaned through surveys, focus groups, site visits, and interviews found that school libraries in the state are predominantly "understaffed, underfunded, and unequipped of up-to-date collections."

Insufficient and Inequitable Staffing

A full-time certified librarian is the most important attribute of a high-quality school library. Unfortunately, the number of librarians in relation to the number of students in a school is decreasing. School libraries are supported by discretionary funding, and therefore, funding is not always stable. Notably, librarians are being cut disproportionately in districts with significant low-income populations. Districts with more students from low-income households would benefit most from high-quality libraries (Neuman & Moland, 2016). Districts in which more than 40 percent of students were from low-income households, experienced decreases in the number of librarian positions. In 2005–2006, there were 66 librarian positions. In 2015–2016, the number decreased to 50 positions. Conversely, districts in which less than 40 percent of students were from low-income households saw increases in librarian positions. In 2005–2006, these districts had 57 librarian positions. In 2015–2016, the

positions increased to 70. Even in districts where the number of positions is growing, the benefits of a certified librarian cannot be fully experienced. School librarians are juggling a wide variety of tasks from performing clerical duties to covering absent teachers. As a result, librarians have little time for professional tasks, collaboration with other librarians and teachers, and professional development.

Under-Supported Financially and Administratively

Currently, school librarians have little representation in the Delaware Department of Education to oversee equitable access to resources, manage collaboration among librarians, and advocate for quality school libraries. The lack of centralized oversight has led to inequities in school libraries throughout the state. At the local level, librarians often do not receive support from their administrations. There are no resources allocated to data collection to report library statistics, which could help reduce the service gap and improve overall library quality.

The lack of support also is evident in the amount of money librarians have to spend on the collection. A study of libraries in 2004 in Delaware recommended school libraries should spend $12–15 per student (Todd R.J., 2006). National data supports this expenditure. A South Carolina study found that spending $11 per student increased student performance (Lance, Rodney, and Schwarz, 2014). However, recent data shows that school libraries in Delaware spend on average about $6.50–$7.50 per student, a vast difference from the 2004 recommendation (Delaware School Library Study Survey, 2015).

Out-of-Date Collections

According to survey data, on average each library only purchases 460 new items per year, which equates to about 3.7 percent of the collection (Delaware School Library Study Survey, 2015). Therefore, it will take 27 years to completely replace the collection, making many materials obsolete. In fact, the Delaware School Libraries Council found in 2013 that nearly 90 percent of STEM books were over the recommended number of years old. One

area in which Delaware has the potential to excel is through providing access to high-quality online databases. The UD Lib/Search tool needs to be leveraged to ensure high levels of resource sharing. The state has also looked into expanding the Delaware Library Catalog, a tool that allows access to all participating public libraries' collections. A current pilot program adds some school libraries into the catalog to leverage Delaware's current resources.

Recommendations

To improve library quality, the *Delaware School Libraries Master Plan* recommends results-oriented approaches. The recommendations are divided into four categories: staffing, content and access, governance and infrastructure, and assessment and accountability. Together they provide a comprehensive plan for improving the quality of Delaware's school libraries. The ten changes include:

1. **Require a school library, a certified librarian, and an appropriate level of support staff in every school.** Various studies identify a full-time certified librarian as the most important factor to a high-quality library. It is also vital that the librarian has adequate support staff who can aid with clerical tasks, giving librarians more time to develop a high-quality library.

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.** Delaware can identify the benefits of a quality library first-hand with a pilot program that funds nine school libraries (an elementary, middle, and high school in each of the state's three counties) at an appropriate level for five years.

3. **Expand student access to "E-Content."** Delaware has an exceptional program, UDLib/Search that provides databases that will help expand the content and access to all students.

4. **Expand the Delaware Library Consortium to include all school libraries.** Doing so will give students access to the Delaware Library Catalog, a tool that gives search access to the collection of every public library in Delaware.

5. **Establish specific governance responsibilities for coordination and oversight of school libraries.** The Delaware Department of Education and Division of Libraries can facilitate coordination among school libraries and with the public library system. This collaboration allows Delaware's libraries to leverage existing resources and create equitable opportunities for libraries throughout the state.

6. **Examine and address systematic issues that inhibit the development of high-quality school library programs.** Libraries need to be sufficiently funded, evaluated, managed, and supported for students to reap the benefits of a quality school library.

7. **Leverage Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) funding to strengthen school libraries.** ESSA's recognition of the importance of school libraries is an opportunity for Delaware's libraries to receive federal funding.

8. **Implement flexible scheduling for school libraries.** Flexible scheduling can lead to coordination between teachers and librarians. If completely flexible scheduling is not feasible, schools should at least implement a combination of fixed and flexible scheduling.

9. **Design and implement an ongoing program of data collection, management, and assessment of school libraries.** Collecting basic data and library statistics allows Delaware to monitor its investment in school libraries and the effects on student success.

10. **Create a Delaware School Library quality index to facilitate the tracking of student performance and investment in school-library services.** Use data collected from recommendation #9 to rate school libraries in conjunction with student achievement scores.

Conclusion

Decades-long research has linked school libraries to increased student success in test scores, reading comprehension, graduation rates, and more positive impacts. The Delaware School Libraries Master Plan attempts to take advantage of the

potential of Delaware's school libraries and create an environment in which students can flourish. The Master Plan makes recommendations in the categories of staffing, content and resources, governance and infrastructure, and assessment and accountability, which, if completed, will drastically change the future of school libraries for the state. Quality school libraries develop life-long learners and, therefore, provide Delaware with an engaged workforce for years to come.

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Authors

Emma Odren, Public Administration Fellow, Institute for Public Administration, University of Delaware

Chris Kelly, Assistant Policy Scientist, Institute for Public Administration, University of Delaware

Prepared for the Partnership for Public Education

The Partnership for Public Education (PPE) is inspired by a vision of excellence and equity in public education for all Delaware children and families. Our work is grounded in the belief that research, practice, family, and community are all needed in the systematic improvement of educational opportunities and outcomes. This goal can only be achieved through collaboration and cooperation.

The mission of PPE is to unite members of the University of Delaware and the broader education community, including schools, families, and community organizations, to identify and address shared needs and opportunities. Together, we can strengthen public education for all Delaware children.

Partnership for Public Administration
182 Graham Hall
University of Delaware
Newark, DE 19716

phone: 302-831-0184
email: aminella@udel.edu

www.sites.udel.edu/ppe/

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Institute for Public Administration
School of Public Policy & Administration
College of Arts & Sciences
180 Graham Hall
University of Delaware
Newark, DE 19716-7380

phone: 302-831-8971 | fax: 302-831-3488
e-mail: ipa@udel.edu

www.ipa.udel.edu

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