

FAST FACTS

Recent Statistics from The Library Research Service

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Public Library Salary Spending Compares Unfavorably with Average Teacher Pay

According to **Public Library Standards for Colorado 1997**, public libraries serving populations under 2,500 should have directors employed for a minimum of 20 hours per week, those serving 2,500 to 9,999, 30 hours per week, and those serving 10,000 and over, 40 hours per week. This standard implies that, in general, libraries should be open and staffed for such hours.

To estimate what staffing public libraries at such levels would cost—allowing for differences from one jurisdiction to another—the average salary for one public school teacher in the same area was used as a benchmark—indeed, a very conservative one.

Adjusting for the conditions described above, how well are the state's public libraries funded for staffing?

- Over one-quarter of the state's public library jurisdictions spend less on all staff salaries than their school district spends on the average teacher's salary.
- Of public libraries serving populations fewer than 2,500, almost half spend less on all staff salaries than the average local teacher's salary.
- Of public libraries serving between 2,500 and 9,999, one quarter spend less on all staff salaries than the average local teacher's salary.



Table 1 ■ Colorado Public Library Salary Spending Compared with Average Teacher's Salaries, 1997

Colorado public libraries by population of legal service area (recommended minimum hours for library director)	Total Number	Spending less than average teacher salary (for specified hours)	
		Number	Percent
Fewer than 2,500 (20 hours per week)	46	21	45.6%
2,500-9,999 (30 hours per week)	32	8	25.0%
10,000 and more (40 hours per week)	34	1	2.9%
Total	112	30	26.8%

Sources: Data on public library salary spending were taken from responses to the 1997 Colorado Public Library Annual Report survey. Data on average teacher's salaries for 1996-97 were obtained from the Research and Evaluation Unit of the Colorado Department of Education.

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Postscript: The Value of an ALA-MLS Degree

How do full-time salaries for Colorado public library directors—with and without master’s degrees from programs accredited by the American Library Association (ALA-MLS)—compare with average teacher pay?

- Of the state’s 37 full-time public library directors with ALA-MLS degrees, only four (10.8 percent) are paid less than the average school teacher in their area.
- Of the state’s 34 full-time public library directors without ALA-MLS degrees, 25 (73.5 percent) are paid less than the average local school teacher.
- Among ALA-MLS directors, the gap for those who earn less than teachers averages about \$3,750 annually. Among directors without ALA-MLS degrees, the gap for those who earn less than teachers averages over \$8,000 annually—a gap more than twice as large.



Methodological Notes

- For purposes of this analysis, teachers are treated as full-time employees. For that reason, only salaries for full-time public library directors are compared with those for teachers. For purposes of public library statistics, “full-time” is defined as 40 hours per week, regardless of the library’s hours of public service or its own local definition of “full-time.”
- While there is no data on the level of education for directors without ALA-MLS degrees, it is known that some graduated from high school, some spent some time in college, and others earned associate’s and bachelor’s degrees. Of course, it is not necessarily inappropriate or surprising that public library directors who lack the bachelor’s degrees required of teachers earn less than them. Unfortunately, the number of such cases is not known.

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