

# FAST FACTS

Recent Statistics from the  
Library Research Service

## The Status of Library Media Center Support of Student Achievement

**How School Librarians Help Kids Achieve Standards**, a.k.a. the second Colorado Study, found that well-staffed, well-stocked, and well-funded library media (LM) programs are an essential component of successful schools. This issue of FAST FACTS examines the status of school library media services that support student achievement.

### Staffing

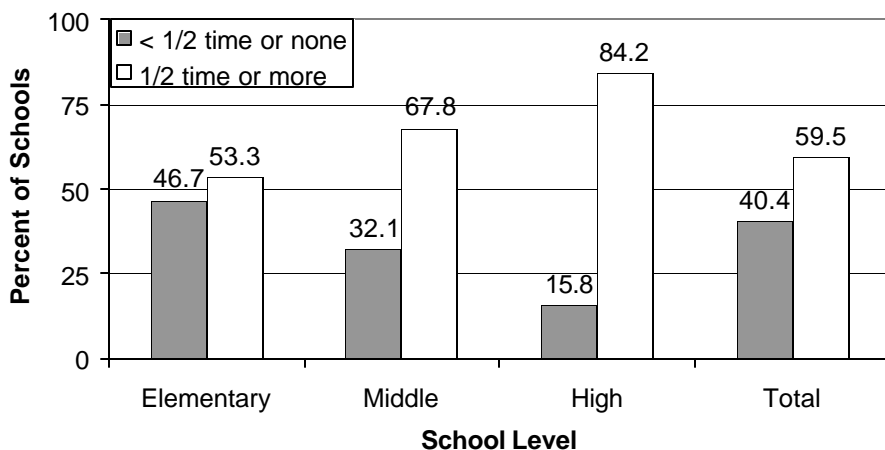
**How School Librarians Help Kids Achieve Standards** specifically found that endorsed library media specialists play a critical role in schools with higher CSAP scores. A professional LMS is:

- a leader, involved in regular meetings with administrators and other faculty, particularly about curriculum and standards issues;
- a collaborator, providing in-service training to teachers and teaching information literacy skills to students; and
- a facilitator of the use of technology to extend the reach of LM programs beyond the walls of the library media center.

### Highlights

- Two out of five public schools have either no library media specialist or one less than half-time. That proportion is almost half for elementary schools.
- The same proportions of all schools and elementary schools have less than one staff member dedicated to the LMC.
- Since 1994, LMS staffing relative to enrollment has dropped more than 10 percent and total staffing more than 25 percent.
- During the same interval, the size of LMC collections and annual spending on them has dropped by one-third. Relative to total per pupil spending, expenditures on LM collections have dropped by half.
- While more and more information is available electronically, the limited number of networked computers in most schools does little to compensate for shrinking collections.

**Figure 1**  
**Level of Library Media Specialist Staffing in**  
**Colorado Public Schools by School Level,**  
**1999**



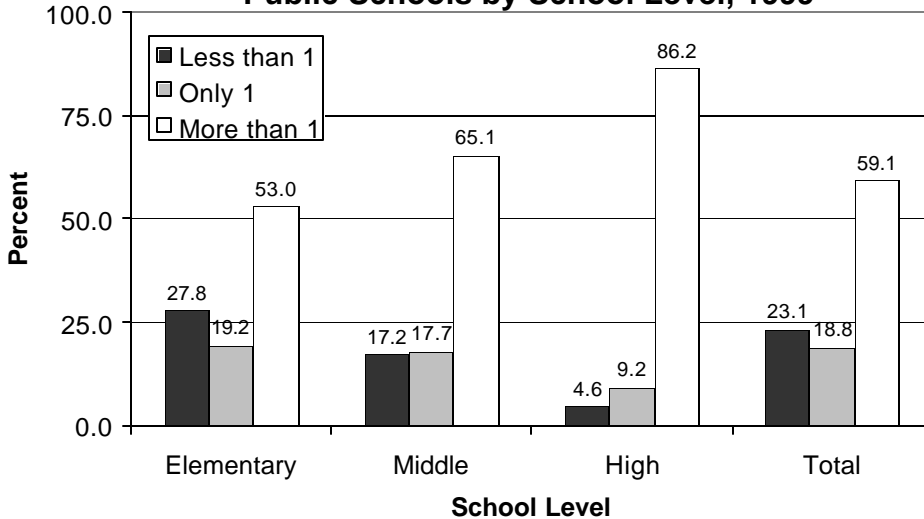
In 1999, almost half of the state's elementary schools had either no library media specialist or one who worked less than half-time. Almost a third of middle school LM programs were understaffed professionally, likewise one out of six high school LM programs. Across all school levels, that means that two

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out of five Colorado school LM programs are not staffed minimally or at all at the professional level. (See Figure 1.)

**Figure 2**  
**Level of Total Library Media Staffing in Colorado Public Schools by School Level, 1999**



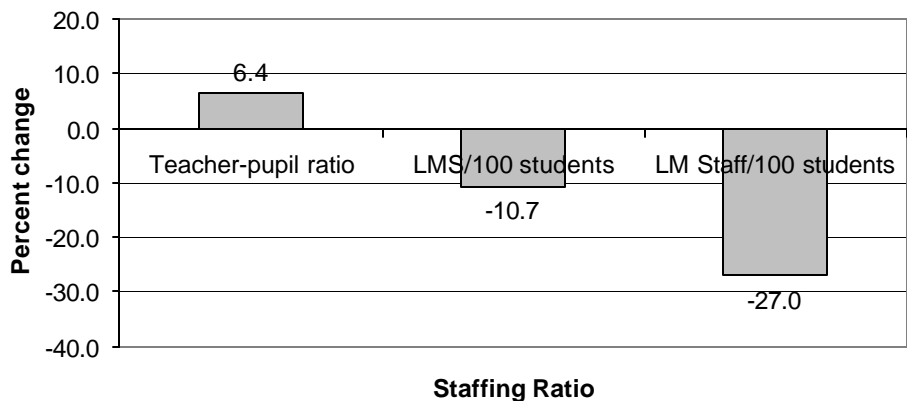
That study also found that the size of the total LM program staff is an important predictor of academic achievement. If endorsed LM specialists are to have the time to be professional educators, they must have support staff who keep open the doors of the LMC and perform more routine but essential tasks.

At the elementary level, more than a quarter of schools have no staff whatever. Reports also indicate that one out of six middle schools and one out of 20 high schools are also unstaffed. (See Figure 2.)

**How School Librarians Help Kids Achieve Standards** demonstrated that LM staff, especially LM specialists, exert positive effects on standards-based test scores, regardless of the school's teacher-pupil ratio. The impact of LM staffing levels is not simply a statistical artifact of the latter statistic.

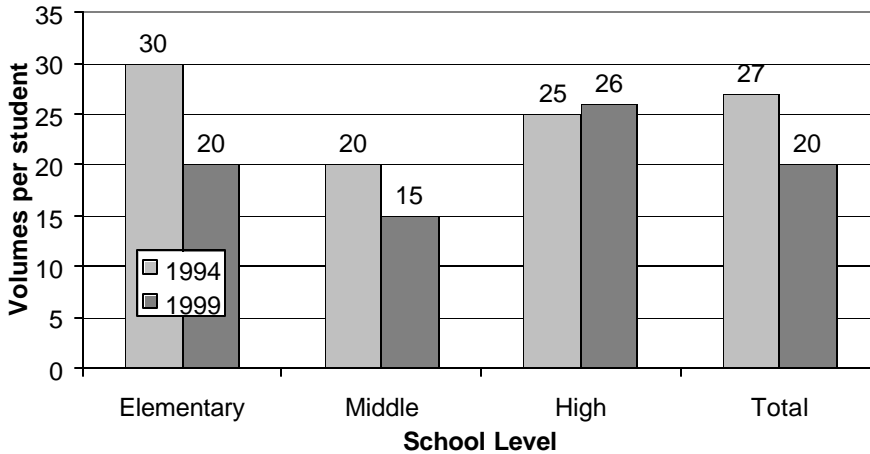
Colorado library media staffing can be compared with the trend in teacher staffing. Between 1994 and 1999, the ratio of teachers to pupils improved more than six percent. At the same time, the ratio of library media specialists to students dropped almost 11 percent and the ratio of total LM staff to students plummeted more than a quarter. (See Figure 3.)

**Figure 3**  
**Percent Change in Teacher, Library Media Specialist, and Library Media Total Staffing Levels from 1994 to 1999**



**Print Collections & Spending**

**Figure 4  
Library Media Volumes Per Student for  
Colorado Public Schools by School Level,  
1994-99**



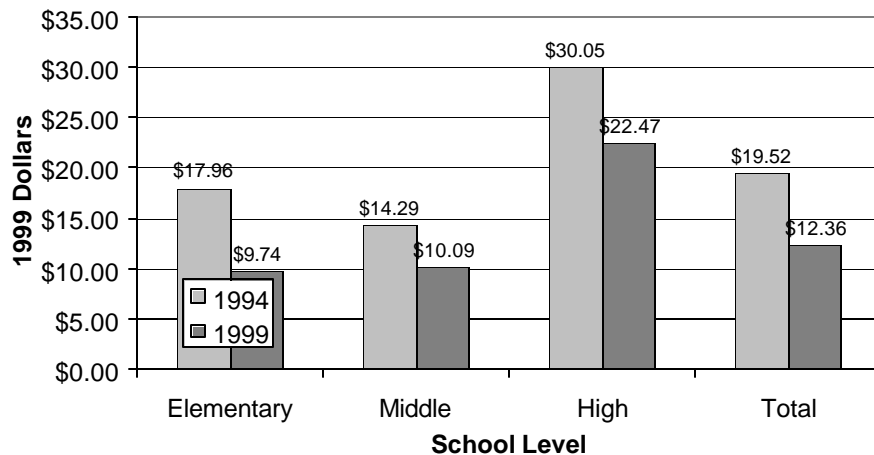
The recent study also demonstrated that the size of library media collections and the level of funding to support their development are also positive predictors of CSAP scores.

Yet, traditional print collections of school library media programs are beginning to shrink at an alarming rate. From 1994 to 1999, the size of the average elementary school collection dropped by a third from 30 volumes per student to 20. This is particularly critical because of the

essential emphasis on reading and reading readiness in elementary schools. Over the same interval, middle school library holdings dropped by a quarter from 20 volumes per student to 15. Interestingly, only high school library collections held their ground at 25 volumes per student in 1994 and 26 volumes per student in 1999. Across school levels, library print collections dropped from 27 volumes per student in 1994 to 20 volumes per student in 1999—a drop of more than a quarter. (See Figure 4.)

The primary reason for the decline in print collections is clear. Public school spending on books and other print materials at every school level fell precipitously between 1994 and 1999. During that period, per student spending on print collection was almost halved for elementary

**Figure 5  
Library Media Print Expenditures Per Student  
for Colorado Public Schools by School Level,  
1994 and 1999**



schools from less than \$18.00 to over \$9.00. Per pupil spending on print for middle and high schools dropped by more than a quarter—from over \$30.00 to about \$22.00 for middle schools and from about \$19.50 to less than \$12.50 for high schools. (See Figure 5.)

Not only did 1999 per pupil spending on library materials drop relative to 1994 levels, it also dropped sharply relative to total per pupil spending. Total per pupil spending (excluding debt payments and bond sales) was \$4,648 in 1994 and \$5,953 in 1999. That makes per pupil spending on library materials 0.4 percent and 0.2 percent of the total, respectively. Thus, in five years, Colorado’s public schools have decreased their spending on books, magazines, videos, and CD-ROMs by 50 percent—from four cents out of every ten dollars to only two cents.

**... but what about the Internet?**

The issue of technology’s role in library media programs was addressed in **How School Librarians Help Kids Achieve Standards**. The number of computers networked to library media resources, particularly the Internet and licensed databases, is an important predictor of CSAP scores. But, it does not supplant the impact of books and other traditional print and non-print materials. When the impact of technology is controlled for, the size of LM collections and spending on them remain important predictors of academic achievement.

For perspective, consider one final chart illustrating the size of the average school’s print collection as well as the average number of networked computers in the school that permit access to electronic information resources. Consider the limitations on the number of simultaneous users, both practically and financially, that are likely with such small numbers of computers available to students. Add to that the navigational, data quality, and ethical issues raised by most Web-based information sources. With these realities in mind, it is no surprise that the study results showed that, while

electronic access to information is becoming increasingly important, it does not eliminate the need for either librarians or libraries. (See Figure 6. *Note:* The scale is logarithmic, moving from 1 to 100 to 1,000, etc. Also, Internet and database computers are also included in networked computers.)

**Figure 6**  
**Average Numbers of Volumes & Networked Computers in Colorado Public Schools by School Level, 1999**

