

# LIBRARIANSHIP IN COLORADO SCHOOL LIBRARIES

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In the recent study, *Retirement, Retention, and Recruitment: The Future of Librarianship in Colorado*, library workers from all types of libraries from around the state were asked about their careers, their workplaces, and their attitudes about librarianship. Included in the study were school librarians, who were defined as librarians with a library media endorsement, Master of Library Science degree, or equivalent and working in a Colorado school library. This issue of Fast Facts reports the responses of the 110 school librarians who participated in the study.

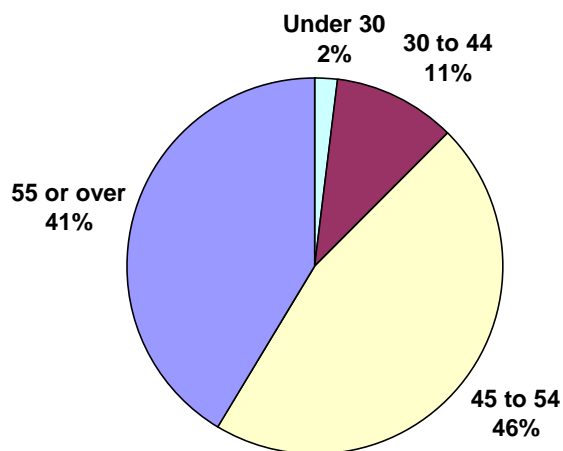
Not surprisingly, three out of four school librarians in the study lived in a metropolitan area (76%) and/or along the Front Range (74%). One in five respondents in this group lived on the Western Slope or in the mountain regions of the state. Only 6 percent of respondents resided along the Eastern Plains.

Nearly 9 out of 10 school librarian respondents were 45 or older. Of those 2 in 5 were 55 or older, a significantly larger proportion than librarian respondents from other library types. Only 2 percent of school librarians responding to the survey were under 30. (See Chart 1.)

## Highlights from School Librarian Respondents

- Nearly 9 out of 10 indicated they were 45 or older.
- Almost half indicated they plan to retire in the next five years (45%).
- 1 in 3 have more than 20 years library work experience.
- 9 out of 10 said they had some experience working or volunteering in a school or library before pursuing a library credential.
- More than 3 out of 5 identified a love of books or reading as a factor making librarianship an attractive profession.
- More than 2 out of 3 said misconceptions about librarianship discouraged a career in the profession.

**Chart 1**  
Colorado School Librarian Respondents -  
Distribution by Age



Forty-six percent of these respondents said they plan to retire in the next five years indicating that at least some of them will retire before the traditional retirement age of 65.

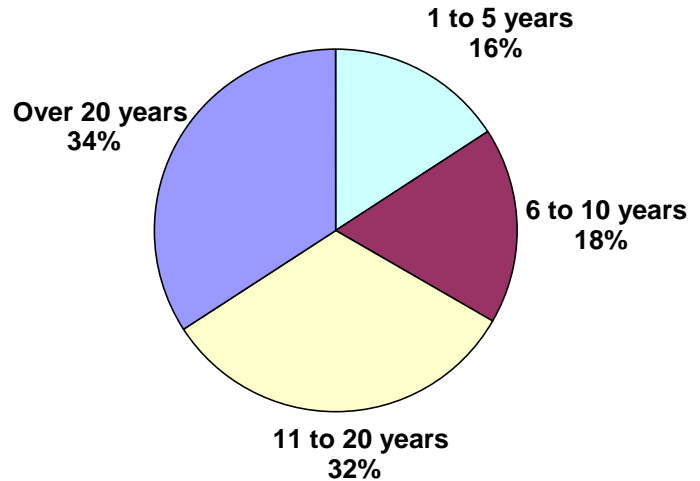
The “graying” of the library profession is evident in the answers given by the school librarian respondents and seems to foretell a shortage of certified librarians in Colorado schools, especially if large numbers of librarians retire before age 65.



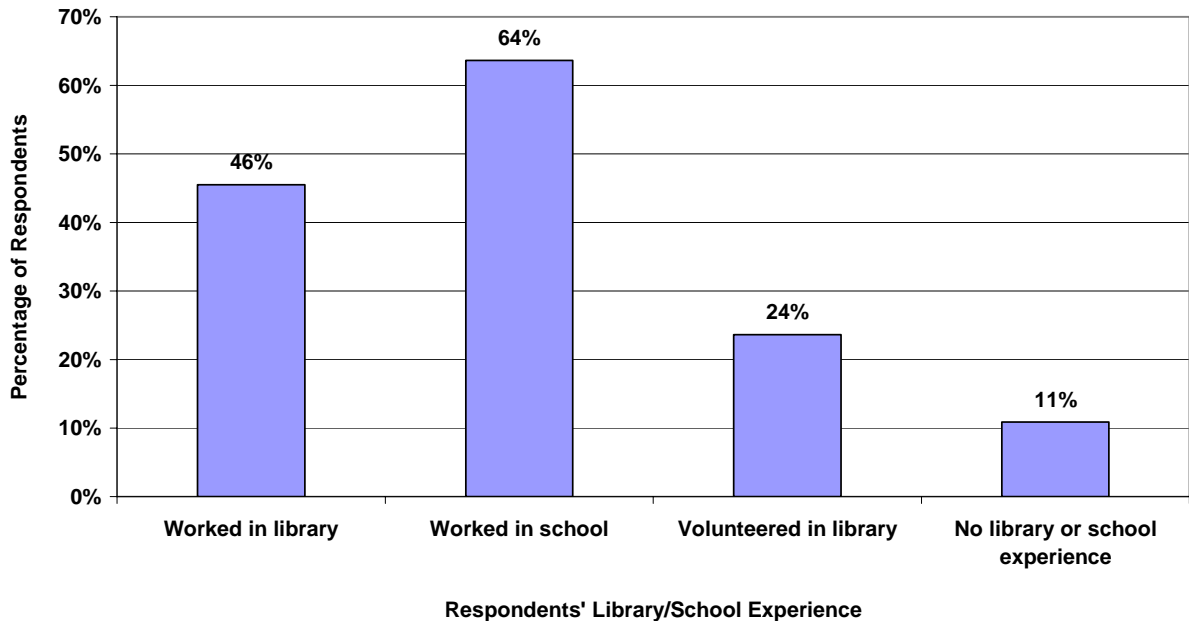
Given the age of this group of respondents it is not surprising that they have an abundance of library work experience. Over one-third had more than 20 years experience and another third had 11 to 20 years experience. The remaining third were almost evenly divided between 6 to 10 years and 1 to 5 years experience. (See Chart 2.)

Before becoming school librarians, the majority of these respondents either worked in a school (64%) and/or a library (46%). In fact, 9 out of 10 said they had some experience working or volunteering in a school or library (i.e., 11% said they had no library or school experience). This indicates that schools and libraries are fertile ground for cultivating future school librarians. (See Chart 3.)

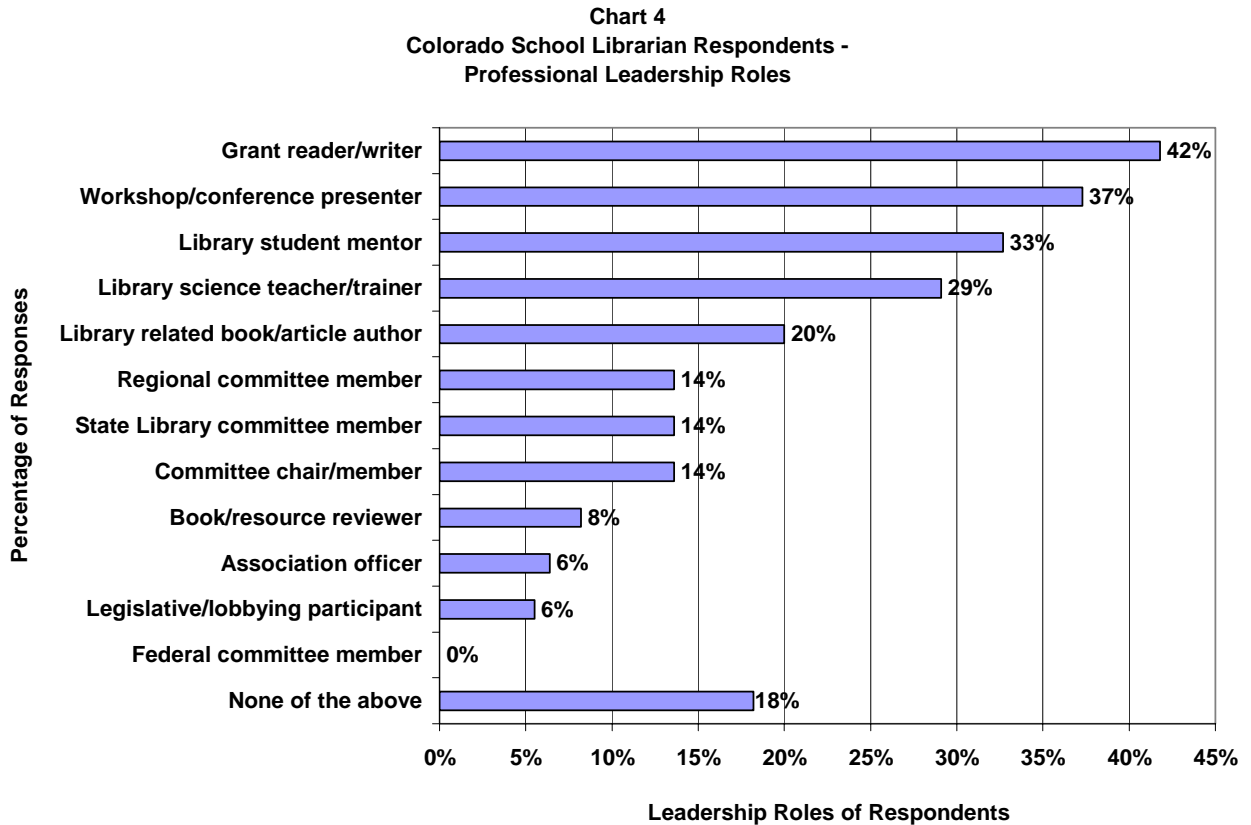
**Chart 2**  
**Colorado School Librarian Respondents - Distribution by Years of Library Employment**



**Chart 3**  
**Colorado School Librarian Respondents - Work Experience Prior to Pursuing a Graduate Degree in Library Science or a School Library Media Endorsement**



Four out of five school librarian respondents indicated they served in professional leadership roles in the last five years (i.e., 18% indicated none of the above). Two out of five school librarians responded that they had been grant readers or writers (42%) and over a third had been presenters at workshops or conferences (37%). Library student mentor (33%) and library science teacher or trainer (29%) were also indicated by approximately 1 in 3 respondents. (See Chart 4.)



This group of respondents indicated love of books or reading (62%) most frequently as a factor that makes librarianship an attractive profession. Perhaps as a reflection of their somewhat different job duties, school library respondents chose this considerably more frequently than those from other types of libraries.

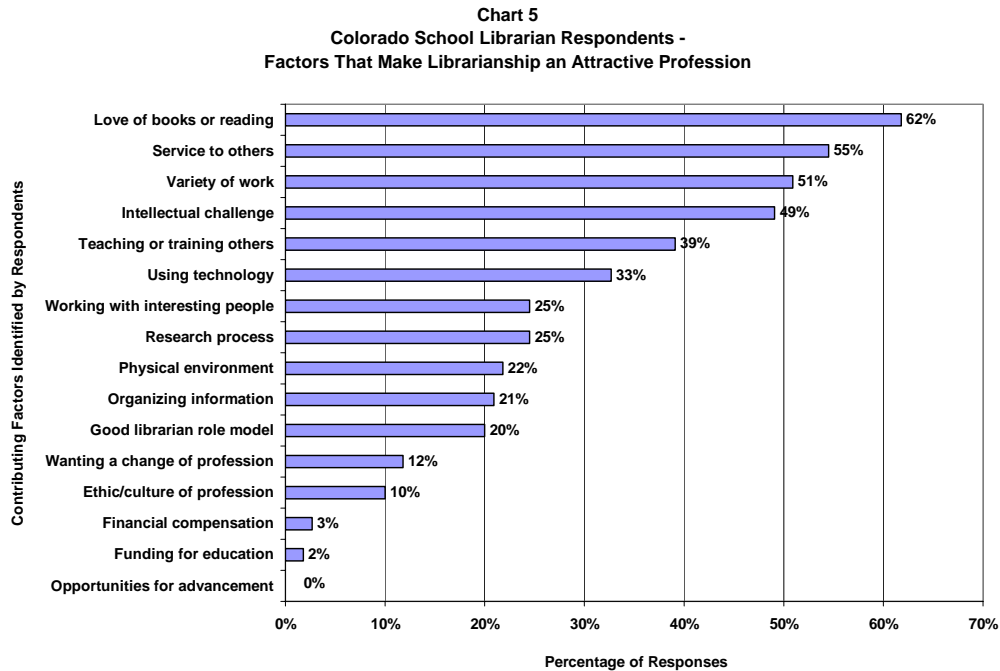
*"I am thrilled to be a Library Media Specialist and I love every day that I work. I encourage other people [to] become a librarian hoping that they too will love it as much as I."*  
 – School Librarian

*Colorado is an exciting place to be a librarian; the library system and the librarians in the state are forward looking and on the cutting edge of librarianship in many areas. Though I, and librarians in general, often do not receive the professional recognition we deserve, everyday I grow mentally and spiritually... How could my professional life be better?*  
 – School Librarian



Approximately half of responding school librarians chose service to others (55%), variety of work (51%), and/or intellectual challenge (49%) as making librarianship a desirable career choice. (See Chart 5.)

No respondents from this group identified opportunities for advancement and very few indicated funding for education (2%) or financial compensation (3%) as factors that make librarianship an attractive career choice.



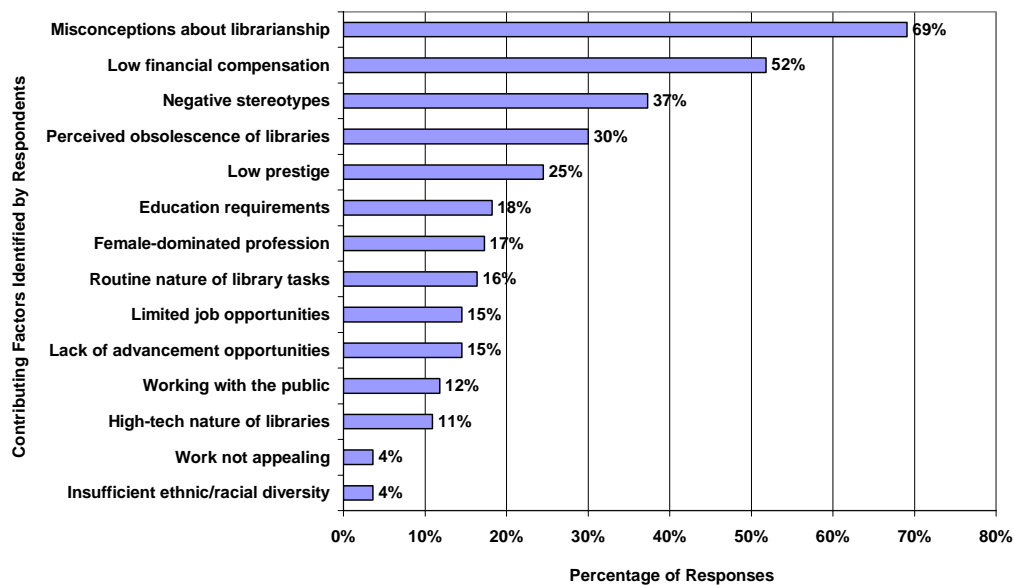
Interestingly, librarians from other types of libraries most frequently indicated low financial compensation as the factor that discourages a career in librarianship. However, school librarians responding to the survey chose misconceptions about librarianship most frequently (69%) and low financial compensation was second (52%). At a distant third, negative stereotypes (37%) was indicated by over a third of this group, followed by perceived obsolescence of libraries (30%). This pattern may reflect the perceptions of school librarians that other educators do not always understand or appreciate their value to schools. (See Chart 6.)

*“I am concerned with schools not replacing retiring media specialist with another specialist. They should be looking for the same qualifications and knowledge/training instead of accepting less. I fear that students and teachers are being short changed.”*  
– School Librarian

*“Not all school districts require endorsed librarians or even certified teachers in their libraries, especially at the elementary level. With budget cuts, these jobs are not at all secure. But the educational requirements are huge. How can we ask people to pursue the education and not guarantee them positions?”*  
– School Librarian



**Chart 6**  
**Colorado School Librarian Respondents -**  
**Factors that Discourage a Career in Librarianship**



When asked how the downturn in the economy had affected their career plans, over half of school librarian respondents had no change of plans (53%) and a third said they decided to stay in their current library job (32%). Retire later (13%) was indicated by 1 in 8 respondents, but only 1 in 13 said retire earlier (8%). Like many of their colleagues from other types of libraries who participated in the study, school librarians' career plans seem relatively unaffected by the economic situation. (See Table 1.)

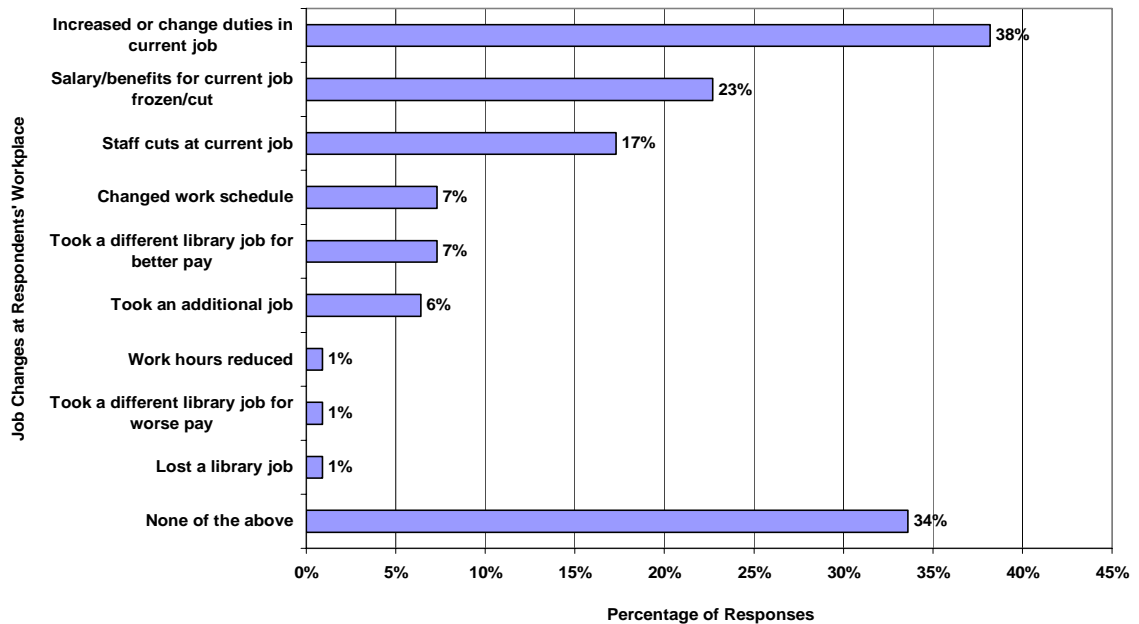
**Table 1**  
**Colorado School Libraries**  
**Affects of the Economic Downturn on Respondents' Career Plans**

No change of plans	53%
Stay in current library job	32%
Retire later	13%
Retire earlier	8%
Seek another library job	5%
Return to school for non-library degree	3%
Return for MLS or media endorsement	2%
Retrain in different library specialty	1%
Leave the library field	0%

One-third of school librarians responding to the survey said there was no change at their current workplaces in the last year (34%). Nearly 2 in 5 said there was an increase or change in duties at their current job (38%). Almost 1 in 4 had salary or benefits frozen or cut (23%) and about 1 in 6 experienced staff cuts at their workplace. (17%). Presumably most of these cuts can be attributed to the economic downturn in the state and the subsequent reduction in school funding. (See Chart 7.)



Chart 7  
Colorado School Librarian Respondents -  
Changes at Their Workplaces in the Last Year



The school librarians who participated in this study were on average over 45 years of age with more than 10 years library experience. They were also quite likely to be considering retiring in the next 5 years. Most had worked in a school or library before becoming a certified librarian and were active in their profession. Many feel a love of books and reading is a key factor in making librarianship an attractive career. However, misconceptions about librarianship were cited most frequently as discouraging to potential librarians.

Given the age and retirement rate of participants in this study, it seems likely that schools in Colorado will experience a severe shortage of certified school librarians. When they leave the profession, these retiring librarians will take with them years of library and classroom experience.

So where will their replacements come from? Quite possibly they can be found in the schools and libraries themselves. Given that most current school librarian respondents had worked in a school or library before becoming librarians, it seems logical to recruit new school librarians from within the ranks of teachers, paraprofessionals, and volunteers. There should be some urgency in this matter, as the profession needs to have new librarians in place before too many more retirements occur, so that the knowledge of one generation of librarians can be passed to the next.

The complete report, *Retirement, Retention, and Recruitment: The Future of Librarianship in Colorado*, can be found at [LRS.org](http://LRS.org).

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