

SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The Issue

School Libraries Work! refers to evidence from research to support the statement that “School libraries staffed by qualified library media specialists do make a measurable difference on student achievement.” (Scholastic, 2006, p. 1.) What is the evidence, and how can that information be used to strengthen the services that library media specialists provide to students?

The Research

Results from over 60 research studies that investigated the impact of school libraries on student achievement have provided information indicating that students in schools with good school libraries get better grades and score higher on external assessments than those students in schools without libraries.

- A Florida study found that students in schools with libraries that were staffed more than 60 hours per week outperformed students in schools with a lower level of library staffing. The difference was greatest at the high school level, where the scores of students in schools with well-staffed libraries were 20% higher than those of their counterparts in schools with libraries with less staffing.
- In Missouri the impact on student achievement of school library services was found to be statistically significant, contributing more than 10% to improvement in achievement. This relationship was not explained away by school or community variables.
- Studies from Iowa, Massachusetts, and Missouri all indicate that students who attend schools with library programs outperform students in schools without such programs.
- In Michigan students with the highest state assessment scores were four times as likely to be able to visit the library on a flexible-schedule basis than their counterparts with low scores. There was a positive correlation between state reading scores and the presence of a certified librarian.
- A Pennsylvania study, which found a positive and statistically significant relationship between library staffing and reading scores on the state assessment, included a cautionary note. The presence of a large materials collection was not sufficient to improve student

achievement; the library and staff services needed to be an integral part of a schoolwide approach to meeting standards and mastering curricula.

Practical Implications

Research that examines correlations between student achievement and school media centers has identified these critical elements for effective media centers:

- Adequate staffing by trained library media specialists. The American Library Association recommends at least one full-time certified librarian for each school library, along with appropriate support staff.
- Flexible access. Rather than a once-a-week-visit on a regular schedule to allow students to check out a book, visits by entire classrooms should take place in relationship to ongoing classroom instruction.
- An atmosphere conducive to multiple uses of the library. There should be areas for quiet reading and for work by groups of various sizes. Active use of the library should be encouraged rather than restrained.
- Adequate resources, both print and electronic. The print materials should be extensive and updated on an ongoing basis. Access to electronic databases and information via the Internet should be available in classrooms and the media center.

Questions to Consider

- Is our media center adequately staffed? If not, what creative steps can we take to enhance staffing?
- What is the status of our materials collection? Are all staff members involved in recommending new materials for purchase?
- Have we included acquisition of information literacy skills in our overall school improvement plan?

References

Molineaux, Rebecca. (2007). *Focus on: How teacher/librarian collaboration can support student learning*. Alexandria, VA: Educational Research Services.

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Scholastic Library Publishing. (2006). *School Libraries Work!* Retrieved October 1, 2007, from http://www.scholastic.com/librarians/printables/downloads/slw_2006.pdf

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