

# Library/Media Centers in U.S. Public Schools: Growth, Staffing, and Resources

## Executive Summary

Kathy D. Tuck, Ph.D.

Dwight R. Holmes, Ph.D.

National Education Association  
Center for Great Public Schools  
Andy Coons, Senior Director

Research Department  
Stacey Pelika, Ph.D., Director

The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing more than 3 million primary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers.

Reproduction: No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission from NEA Research, except by NEA-affiliated associations and NEA members. Any reproduction of this material must contain an appropriate credit line and copyright notice. Address communications to Editor, NEA Center for Great Public Schools, 1201 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-3290.

## Executive Summary

This study analyzes data collected between 2000 and 2013 from the annual National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) [Common Core of Data](#) (CCD) Local Education Agency (School District) Universe Survey; the NCES [Schools and Staffing Survey \(SASS\)](#); and the U.S. Census Bureau [Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates Survey \(SAIPE\)](#). The findings presented in this study show substantial differences in student access to public school library/media centers, to librarians/media specialists, and to up-to-date library/media resources. Differences are shown across the 50 United States and the District of Columbia, and are based on school/grade level, on school poverty level, on ethnic minority status, and on the type of community in which a school is located (*i.e.*, inner city, suburban, small town, or rural).

### Growth Trends in Library/Media Centers

**Nearly all U.S. public schools have a library/media center, but over the past decade the number has changed with the economy. Since 2007 there has been a national decline in the number of public school library/media centers, and stark differences have continued to emerge among the states in the number of school library/media centers that have opened and closed. Notable changes during this period have resulted in substantially more elementary and middle schools with library/media centers than high schools, and there are fewer library/media centers operating in high-poverty schools than in wealthier schools. Based on the community location, only schools in the inner cities had a decline in the number of library/media centers since 2007.**

- Ninety percent (90.1%) of U.S. public schools have a library/media center and, compared to a decade ago (2003-04), the overall percentage of schools with library/media centers has increased slightly (+1.4 percentage points). However, when one looks only at trends since 2007 the percentage of schools with library/media centers has dropped slightly (-0.07 percentage points). There are still 8,830 public schools without library/media center resources.
- All 50 states and the District of Columbia report that at least three-fourths of their public schools have library/media centers, with the largest percentages of schools with library/media centers found in Oklahoma and Maryland (99.3% and 98.5%, respectively). Since 2007, eight states experienced a decline of more than 5 points in the percentage of schools with library/media centers, with the largest declines reported in Alaska and Massachusetts (-15.1 percentage points and -13.3 percentage points, respectively). Eight states increased in percentages of schools with library/

media centers by 5 points or more, with the largest increases reported in South Dakota, Maryland, and Utah (+10.3 percentage points, +8.3 percentage points, and +7.8 percentage points, respectively).

- Fewer high schools have library/media centers (83.7%) than elementary and middle schools (94.2% and 95.7%, respectively), but combined-grade schools (*e.g.*, special education and alternative schools) are less likely to have a library/media center (67.6%) than any other category of schools. In 2007, a 12 percentage point gap between elementary and secondary schools began to narrow as secondary schools started to gain library/media centers and elementary schools continued to lose them. A gain of 6.8 percentage points in secondary school libraries has narrowed that gap to 5.4 percentage points.
- Since 2007, student poverty levels (based on percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch—FRPL) have had little impact on school library/media center openings and closings. Substantially fewer schools (85.0%) with the highest level of student poverty (*i.e.*, 75% or more students in poverty) have library/media centers compared to schools at other income levels (95.2% of schools with 0–34% students in poverty, 95.8% of schools with 35–50% students in poverty, and 92.6% of schools with 50–74% students in poverty).
- Fewer inner city schools have library/media centers (85.5%) and, since 2007, slight increases in the percentage of library/media centers have been reported in schools across all community locations *except* inner cities, where there has been a 5 percentage point loss. Small town, rural, and suburban schools have all increased in percentages of school library/media centers (+2.2 percentage points, +2.1 percentage points, and +0.61 percentage points, respectively).

### Staffing Trends in Library/Media Centers

**Over the past decade, the numbers of librarians/media specialists and support staff (*i.e.*, aides and clerical staff) have risen and fallen, but the ratios of librarians/media specialists and support staff both per school and per student have generally fallen because of increases in the student population. Since 2007, library/media center staffing ratios have been in continuous decline; they fell especially sharply after federal [American Recovery and Reinvestment Act \(ARRA\)](#) funds were depleted in 2011. Staffing in charter school library/media centers has been somewhat more stable than in traditional schools, but the overall staffing trend is still downward in this sector.**

- Nationally, the total number of public school librarians/media specialists (full- and part-time) has increased by 8.8 percent since 2007, but changes in the number across the 50 states and the District of Columbia have varied widely. Twenty-one states surpassed the national average increase of 8 percent, with 7 states gaining at least 20 percent more librarians/media specialists since 2007. Fifteen states have had a net loss of librarians/media specialists since 2007, with Hawaii reporting as much as a 30 percent loss of librarians/media specialists.
- There was a modest increase in the number of library/media centers that have at least one full-time state-certified librarian/media specialist, increasing the percentage to 66.4. In addition, 12.6 percent of library/media centers do not have a full-time librarian/media specialist but do have at least one part-time librarian/media specialist.

- The ratio of librarians/media specialists per school has fallen to its lowest level in a decade (0.44, or one librarian/media specialist for every 2.28 schools) and the ratio of librarians/media specialists per 100 students is also at its lowest level in a decade (0.09 per 100 students, or 1 librarian/media specialist for every 1,129 students).
- The same ratio for charter schools has fallen since 2007, but at a faster rate than for traditional schools. The librarian/media specialist-per-student ratio in charter schools is substantially smaller than it is in traditional schools, with one charter librarian/media specialist for every 4,397 charter students. This is a 33 percent drop from the 2000 ratio for charter schools, compared to an 18 percent drop for traditional schools.
- Nationally, the ratio of library/media center support staff and volunteers to librarians/media specialists is nearly 4 to 1. The average ratio across the states varies widely, from a high of 6 to 1 in Massachusetts to a low of 1.2 to 1 in South Dakota. The largest ratios of support staff and volunteers to librarians/media specialists are reported in elementary schools (4.23 to 1), low-poverty schools (4.84 to 1), and suburban schools (4.67 to 1).

### **By Grade/School Level**

**Secondary schools and combined-grade schools showed substantial changes in library/media center staffing over the past decade, while elementary schools continue to have the most full- and part-time librarians/media specialists. However, the number of public school library/media centers with at least one full-time librarian/media specialist is greater in secondary schools.**

- There are one-and-a-half times more librarians/media specialists in elementary schools than there are in secondary schools but, since 2007, elementary schools have lost full-time and part-time library/media center specialists (-12.0%) while both secondary schools and combined-grade schools have had substantial increases (+56.5% and +41.4%, respectively).
- The number of library/media centers with at least one full-time state-certified librarian/media center specialist is substantially lower in elementary schools than in secondary schools (61.9% versus 75.3%), but the lowest percentage of library/media centers with full-time librarians/media specialists is in combined-grade schools (56.8%). However, combined-grade schools had the largest increase in full-time librarians/media specialists since 2007 (10.7%).
- There are more library/media centers in elementary and combined-grade schools that have no full-time librarians/media specialists but that have at least one part-time librarian/media specialist (14.6% and 11.1%, respectively) than there are in secondary schools (9.6%).

### **By Student Poverty and Community Location**

**Over the past decade, library/media centers in the poorest schools have shown the largest increase in total number of librarians/media specialists (full- and part-time), and the poorest schools have shown the largest increase in the number of library/media centers with at least one full-time state-certified librarian/media specialist. However, proportionally they still fall short of other school library/media centers in their ratio of**

**librarians/media specialists to students. Small towns are the only community locations to show an overall loss of librarians/media specialists, but small town and rural schools increased in the percentage of library/media centers that have at least one full-time state-certified librarian/media specialist.**

- Since 2007, library/media centers in the wealthiest schools (0–34% students in poverty) lost 12.8 percent of their librarians/media specialists, while library/media centers in schools at all other income levels gained librarians/media specialists—more librarians/media specialists were gained as the school poverty levels increased (gains from +10.5% to +40.8%). Library/media centers in small town schools lost 5.9 percent of the total number of librarians/media specialists they had in 2007, while library/media centers in all other communities had net gains (+5.5% in suburban schools, +12.4% in inner city schools, and +14.1% in rural schools).
- More library/media centers (70.0% to 70.8%) with at least one full-time state-certified librarian/media specialist are found in schools with moderate levels of student poverty while schools with the highest and lowest poverty levels (defined as having more than 75% of students in poverty or less than 34% of students in poverty) have fewer (62.3% and 65.5%, respectively). However, since 2007 the percentage of library/media centers with at least one full-time state-certified librarian/media specialist has increased (gains of up to +7.6 percentage points) as school poverty levels have increased. The percentage of rural and small town schools with at least one full-time state-certified librarian/media specialist also increased by more than 5 points, making schools across all communities more equalized (from 64.9% in inner city schools to 69.2% in suburban schools).

### **District Level Staffing Ratios by Student Poverty and Ethnic Minority Status**

There are sharp differences in the numbers of librarians/media specialists working in public school library/media centers based on the ratio measured—whether librarians/media specialists per school or librarians/media specialists per student—but both ratios show clear disparities in staffing, with adverse outcomes for high-poverty schools and particularly for high ethnic minority status schools. Staffing ratios are also found to vary by school/grade level, and the effects of poverty and ethnic minority status are exemplified in the all-elementary and all-secondary school districts that include a sizable number of large urban and rural schools. See the Methodology section in the Full Report for information about Units of Analysis included in these findings.

**Historically, all-elementary districts have had fewer librarians/media specialists per school in comparison to all-secondary districts. However, in comparing the number of librarians/media specialists per student, their ratios have been more equivalent; sharp declines have recently occurred at both school levels, particularly in the all-elementary districts, and the gap has narrowed considerably. Library/media center staffing levels in unified districts (preK–12) have also declined somewhat over the decade, but these levels have been more stable than have trends in all-elementary and all-secondary districts. Library/media centers in all-elementary and all-secondary districts, comprised of in large part inner city and rural schools, have substantially lower staffing ratios than library/media centers in unified districts.**

- Consistently throughout the past decade, all-elementary school districts have had lower ratios of librarians/media specialists per school than have all-secondary and unified (preK–12) districts. Losses have been much more dramatic in all-secondary school districts as these districts are currently near half the staffing levels they reported at the start of the decade (0.35 librarians/media specialists per school). Drops in all-elementary districts have placed them back down near their same staffing levels as a decade ago (0.20 librarians per school).
- Ratios of librarians/media specialists per school in unified districts have dropped by nearly one-quarter (down to 0.47 librarians/media specialists per school), but have been much more stable in their staffing of librarians/media specialists per school than have all-elementary and all-secondary districts.
- The ratio of librarians/media specialists per student reveals a different picture. The staffing per student ratios in both all-elementary and all-secondary districts have declined more sharply in comparison to unified districts, and the gap between all-elementary and all-secondary districts has been narrowed considerably (to 0.04 and 0.05, respectively, librarians/media specialists per 100 students). Unified districts dropped by one-quarter in their ratio of librarians/media specialists per student over the decade, but they still have a ratio nearly twice that of all-elementary and all-secondary districts (0.09 librarians/media specialists per 100 students).

### **Poverty and Race/Ethnicity Effects**

***In All-Elementary Districts:* Regardless of poverty level, the all-elementary districts with the highest ethnic minority status (25–100% ethnic minority students) have fewer librarians/media specialists per student than low ethnic minority status districts (0–6% ethnic minority students). In districts with low ethnic minority status, the wealthiest schools have multiple times more librarians/media specialists per school than the poorest schools in districts with high ethnic minority status.**

- Library/media center staffing in all-elementary districts varies more with ethnic minority status of schools than with level of poverty of school. Districts with the most ethnic minority (*i.e.*, mostly Black and Hispanic) students, regardless of poverty level (high, medium, or low), have fewer librarians/media specialists per school (from 0.07 for high-poverty districts to 0.21 for low-poverty districts) when compared to districts with the fewest ethnic minority (*i.e.*, mostly White) students (from 0.23 for high-poverty districts to 0.37 for low-poverty districts). Overall, the wealthiest schools in low ethnic minority status districts have 5 times more librarians/media specialists per school than do the poorest schools in high ethnic minority status districts.
- Similar patterns are found when examining the ratio of librarians/media specialists per student. Regardless of their poverty level, schools in low ethnic minority status districts have 3.5 to 5 times more librarians/media specialists per student than do schools in high ethnic minority status districts.

***In All-Secondary Districts:* The most ethnically diverse all-secondary districts showed the highest ratio of librarians/media specialists per school, and the low ethnic minority status districts showed the highest ratio of librarians/media specialists per student.**

**Poverty has a stronger effect on library/media center staffing when there are more ethnic minority students present.**

- In all-secondary school districts, a similar picture emerges as in all-elementary districts but with some caveats. The library/media center staffing ratio per school in all-secondary districts is highly related to both student poverty and ethnic minority status, but the most ethnically diverse districts have the highest staffing ratios across the different poverty levels (from 0.19 to 0.82 librarians per school) in comparison to staffing ratios in both high ethnic minority status districts (from 0.14 to 0.50 across poverty levels) and staffing ratios in low ethnic minority status districts (from 0.50 to 0.59 across poverty levels). In ethnically diverse districts, the wealthiest schools have more than 5 times the number of librarians/media specialists than the poorest schools in high ethnic minority status districts.
- In comparing librarians/media specialists per student, low ethnic minority status districts, regardless of poverty level, have more librarians/media specialists (0.18 to 0.31 per 100 students) than other all-secondary districts across the board; the poorest schools in the low ethnic minority status districts have 31 times more librarians/media specialists than do the poorest schools in high ethnic minority status districts (0.31 and 0.01 librarians/media specialists per 100 students, respectively).
- In all-secondary districts, poverty has a stronger relationship with library/media center staffing when there are more ethnic minority students—the wealthiest high ethnic minority status districts have 3 to 4 times more library/media center specialists per school than the poorest schools. When there are few ethnic minority students in the district, the distribution of library/media center specialists across different poverty levels is more equitable.

***In Unified Districts:* Library/media center staffing in unified districts (preK–12) is vastly more equal across poverty and ethnic minority status levels than it is in all-elementary and all-secondary districts. However, the unified districts with fewer ethnic minority students do have slightly more librarians/media specialists per student than districts with higher ethnic minority status levels.**

- Comparisons show that staffing ratios per school in unified districts are more equalized and are not as highly associated with school poverty or ethnic minority status levels as those in all-elementary and all-secondary districts. The poorest districts have staffing ratios per school that are more similar to those in the wealthiest districts (0.40 and 0.44, respectively); high ethnic minority status districts have staffing ratios that are just slightly higher than those in low ethnic minority status districts (0.41 and 0.35, respectively).
- Similarly, the ratio of librarians/media specialists per student in unified districts shows little relationship with poverty level, but a slightly inverse relationship is found with ethnic minority status level; unified districts with the lowest ethnic minority level have slightly more librarians/media specialists per student than medium and high ethnic minority status districts (0.14, 0.11, and 0.10, respectively, per 100 students).



## Quality of Professional Staffing

The vast majority of librarians/media specialists in public schools have met the qualifications for state certification, and many are also state-certified as classroom teachers or hold a master's degree in a library-related field. However, states vary widely in their numbers of certified library/media center staff, and library/media center staff in secondary schools are more likely than those in elementary schools to have certifications or hold master's degrees. Schools serving the most disadvantaged students—special education schools, alternative schools, and schools with the highest numbers of students in poverty—have the lowest percentages of certified staff and of staff with advanced training.

- Most librarians/media specialists (82.9%) are state-certified and nearly two-thirds (63.0%) are also state-certified as classroom teachers. Slightly more than half of librarians/media specialists (51.8%) also hold a master's degree in a library-related field.
- Thirty-two states surpassed the national average of 82 percent in their proportions of library/media specialists who are state-certified. Hawaii (97.5%) and Tennessee (97.2%) lead with the highest percentages of certified librarians/media specialists; Kentucky and Alabama lead in percentages of library/media center specialists who are also state-certified classroom teachers (89.3% and 88.5%, respectively); and South Carolina and Kentucky report the highest rates of librarians/media specialists who also hold master's degrees (88.9% and 88.2%, respectively).
- Across grade levels, elementary schools have slightly fewer state-certified librarians/media specialists than middle and high schools (81.7%, 67.2%, and 85.4%, respectively), and fewer librarians/media specialists in elementary schools have teaching certifications in comparison to middle and senior high school specialists (60.3%, 67.9%, and 68.5%, respectively). Librarians/media specialists in elementary schools are also substantially less likely to have master's degrees in comparison to those in middle and high schools (48.5%, 58.2%, and 60.2%, respectively). The largest differences in qualifications are found in comparisons between traditional schools and combined-grade schools, which have up to 13.3 percentage points fewer state-certified librarians/media specialists, up to 12.2 percentage points fewer librarians/media specialists certified as teachers, and up to 22 percentage points fewer librarians/media specialists with master's degrees than traditional schools.
- More moderate-income schools (85.5% to 87.6%) have state-certified librarians/media specialists than do either the wealthiest or the poorest schools (80.4% and 80.2%, respectively). Also, the number of librarians/media specialists who are certified as both librarians and as teachers increases as poverty level increases, until reaching the highest poverty level (75% or more students in poverty) when a substantial drop occurs. A somewhat similar pattern is also noted for librarians/media specialists with master's degrees.
- Library/media center staff in schools across all community locations have similar levels of library and teacher certification, but slightly more librarians/media specialists in suburban schools have master's degrees in a library-related field (56.2%).

## Availability of Resources in Library/Media Centers

**Automation:** Most library/media centers in public schools have been modernized to include automated circulation and catalog systems, but few have been upgraded to ensure that systems are accessible by staff and students with disabilities.

- Nearly all (90.3%) library/media centers in public schools have automated circulation systems, and the vast majority (88.3%) also have automated catalogs for staff and student use.
- Fewer than a dozen states report that less than 80 percent of their library/media centers are automated, but library/media centers in the poorest schools and in combined-grade schools are less likely to have automated systems compared to those in other schools. Few differences are noted between the automation of library/media centers based on school location.
- Less than one-third (31.0%) of library/media centers have technology to assist staff and students with disabilities, but Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia lead the way with the highest percentage of library/media centers having such capacity (42.8%, 40.7%, and 40.5%, respectively).

**Book Titles and Audio/Video Holdings:** The average number of book titles held by public school library/media centers has increased during the past decade, but the size of the collection is smaller in higher grades. Combined-grade schools showed the largest increase in book titles since 2007, and only secondary schools showed a net decline in book titles. The increase in book titles in inner city schools was substantially smaller than in other communities, and the ratio of book titles per student was smaller in both inner city and suburban school library/media centers than it was in other communities.

- The average number of book titles in public school library/media centers is 21.8 books per student, which is a 9 percent increase over the number of 2007 titles. All but 16 states report their public school library/media centers have 20 or more book titles per student, on average, and Alaska reports the most book titles at 50.7 per student while Hawaii reports the fewest at 15.1 per student.
- Library/media centers in elementary schools and combined-grade schools hold substantially more book titles (27.5 and 25.3 per student, respectively) than library/media centers in secondary schools (16.8 per student), and combined-grade schools also have, on average, more audio/video holdings per student (1.18) than other school library/media centers.
- The poorest schools showed the smallest increase in book titles since 2007, but the ratio of book titles per student is similar across all levels of school poverty (from 21.2 books per student in the lowest-poverty schools to 22.6 books per student in schools with 50–74% of students in poverty).
- Library/media centers in small town and rural schools have substantially more book titles per student (24.9 and 24.7, respectively) than do library/media centers in inner city and suburban schools (19.7 and 20.1, respectively). Since 2007, inner city school library/media centers showed an increase in book titles that is one-third the size of increases in other types of communities.

**Portable Technologies: Most public school library/media centers provide staff and students with access to a broad range of media resources and other portable technologies (e.g., video recorders/players and laptops) for use in school and at home. However, fewer than half of school library/media centers provide students with access to laptops outside school, and even fewer of the poorest school library/media centers provide such access. The poorest schools are, however, similar to other schools in providing laptops to staff.**

- The majority (83.2%) of public school library/media centers have portable media technologies, such as video recorders/players, for staff and student use, and middle school library/media centers have slightly more (90.0%) video technology resources than other schools. Substantially fewer inner city schools (78.3%), low-income level schools (79.0%), and combined-grade schools (77.1%) have video technology resources for students.
- Fewer than half (40.2%) of public school library/media centers have laptops for student use outside the library/media center, and just over half (54.3%) have laptops for staff use outside the library/media center. Twenty-nine states report that at least half of their library/media centers have laptops for staff use outside the library/media center compared to other schools (41.0% to 42.1%), but only 12 states report that at least half of their library/media centers have laptops for students to check out.
- Middle school library/media centers have slightly more laptops for student (46.1%) and staff (60.4%) use outside the library/media center than other school/grade levels. The poorest schools have moderately fewer (36.2%) library/media centers with laptops for student use outside the library/media center compared to wealthier schools (41.0% to 42.1%). However, they are similar to wealthier schools in their laptops for staff use outside (55.4%).
- Fewer library/media centers in small town and inner city schools provide laptops for students (36.8% and 37.4%, respectively) compared to library/media centers in rural and suburban schools (40.8% and 43.6%, respectively). Small town schools library/media centers also provide fewer laptops for staff (49.2%) in comparison to other schools (54.3% to 55.4%).

**Computers and Internet: Most public school library/media centers provide staff and students with computers, but the number of computers available increases with grade level and decreases substantially with student poverty level. Nearly all computer workstations in public school library/media centers are connected to the internet, but connectivity decreases with grade level while it increases slightly with student poverty level.**

- Nearly all (96.6%) public school library/media centers have computer workstations for staff and student use, and there are only four states that fall below the 90 percent threshold: Alaska (79.7%), South Dakota (84.7%), Maine (85.4%), and Arizona (89.1%). Fewer library/media centers in combined-grade schools (89.6%) have computers compared to those in traditional grade schools (96.5% to 98.9%).
- The average number of computers per school in library/media centers is 18; that average increases substantially with grade level (from 12 in elementary schools to 33 in high schools). As school poverty level increases from the lowest level (less

than 34% of students in poverty) to the highest level (more than 75% of students in poverty) the average number of computers drops substantially (from 22 to 14).

- On average, suburban school library/media centers have more computer workstations (21) than do schools in inner city, town, and rural communities (17 to 18), but suburban schools have slightly fewer computers connected to the internet (93.2%) in comparison to schools in the other communities (95.2% to 97.6%).
- Nearly all (95.3%) computer workstations in public school library/media centers have access to the internet, and 12 states report 99–100 percent connectivity. The percentage of computers connected to the internet decreases with grade level (from 98.3% in elementary schools to 91.1% in high schools), but there is slightly higher internet connectivity in the highest poverty schools compared with the lowest poverty schools (96.4% and 93.7%, respectively).

**Online Databases: Most library/media centers provide access to online databases (e.g., indexes, abstracts, and reference sources such as encyclopedias) for student use in school, but access to online databases outside school differs substantially, with less access provided to students in the poorest schools and in small town and rural schools.**

- A majority (86.4%) of library/media centers provide students with access to online licensed databases. Among those library/media centers providing access, nearly all (94.8%) provide students with access from the classroom, and more than three-fourths (78.4%) provide access from students' homes.
- More library/media centers in suburban and inner city schools provide students with access to online databases at home (83.1% and 80.4%, respectively) compared to small town and rural library/media centers (75.6% and 73.9%, respectively). Substantially fewer library/media centers in the poorest schools (70.8%) and combined-grade schools (67.3%) provide home access to students.

**Expenditures: Annual spending on all library/media center resources varies widely by state; schools at the lower grade levels spend more than schools at the upper grade levels. However, the poorest schools spend more per student on library/media center resources than do all other schools.**

- The average expenditure in library/media centers for all information resources during the 2010–11 school year was \$16.00 per student; but states varied widely, from \$37.93 per student in Wisconsin to \$6.43 per student in Hawaii.
- Library/media center expenditures decline steadily as grade level increases, but combined-grade schools spend up to \$4.38 per student more than traditional schools. The poorest schools spend the most of all schools at an average of \$19.25 per student, while suburban schools spend the least at \$13.68 per student.

### **Student Use of Library/Media Centers**

**On average, all students have weekly access to library/media center services and opportunities to check out one or more books. However, students in nearly half of the states regularly fall below the weekly visit threshold, and visits decrease as school/grade level increases. While students in the poorest schools make fewer weekly**

**visits to the library/media center, they tend to check out more books. Inner city students also make fewer visits to the library/media center than students in other communities.**

- The national average for weekly visits to the library/media center is one per week (or 100 visits per 100 students), and students check out an average of 1.1 books per student per week (or 110 books per 100 students). Twenty-eight states meet or exceed the national average of weekly visits; 29 states meet or exceed the national weekly average of books checked out.
- High school students are less likely to visit school library/media centers than are students in elementary and middle schools, and fewer students in combined-grade schools visit the library/media center weekly compared to all other grade levels (80 student visits per 100 students). As grade level increases, the average number of books students check out weekly declines substantially, from 1.7 books weekly per student at the primary level to less than 1 book weekly per student (0.30) at the secondary level.
- Schools at the highest poverty level have a weekly average of 80 visits per 100 students, indicating that at least 20 percent of students at the poorest schools do not visit a school library/media center each week. Students attending the poorest schools do tend to check out slightly more books and other materials from the library/media center (1.1 and 1.2 books weekly per student) compared to students at the wealthiest schools (1.0 book weekly per student).
- Similar to students at the poorest schools, fewer students at inner city schools make weekly visits to the library/media center (80 per 100 students), but unlike the poorest students they check out slightly fewer books (1.0 book per week) in comparison to students at schools in other community locations (1.3 to 1.2 books per week).
- Most (89.0%) schools permit students to use library/media centers independently during regular school hours, and slightly more than half also permit students to use library/media centers independently before and after school (57.1% and 54.0%, respectively). Access before and after school hours, however, varies widely across the states, from 90.6 percent (Hawaii) to 34.7 percent (Rhode Island) before school and from 90.8 percent (Hawaii) to 28.8 percent (West Virginia) after school.
- As grade level increases, school library/media centers are more likely to be available to students for independent use during regular school hours (from 84.0% to 97.0%); similar patterns are found beyond regular school hours (from 42.8% to 84.6% before school, and from 39.0% to 82.9% after school).
- Substantially fewer of the poorest schools (48.7%) allow students to use library/media centers independently, particularly before school, compared to the wealthiest schools (61.3%). However, after school substantially fewer library/media centers in suburban schools (48.4%) provide independent access to students in comparison to schools in rural, inner city, and small town communities (54.6%, 57.0%, and 58.5%, respectively).

## Conclusions

The findings of this study show that student access to school library/media centers, to librarians/media specialists, and to up-to-date library/media center resources varies

widely across states, districts, school locations, and student characteristics. Moreover, there is strong evidence that wide disparities in library/media center resources have existed throughout the decade based on poverty level and ethnic minority status. Few gaps in library/media center resources have been reduced between schools, and gaps in the professional staffing of library/media centers are still widely apparent. While the study findings show that the poorest students have the least access to certain resources and particularly to librarians/media specialists, it is clear that ethnic minority status has an even stronger association with student access to library/media center resources than does poverty level.