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The Journal for School Library Professionals

is committed to collaborative partnerships for improved student learning through thought-provoking and challenging feature articles, strategies for effective advocacy, regular review columns, and critical analyses of management and programming issues.

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notebook by esther rosenfeld and david loertscher

improving literacy through school libraries: evaluation report

The Improving Literacy Through School Libraries (ILTSL) program was created in 2001 as part of the No Child Left Behind Act. A competitive grant awards program that is now in its fourth cycle, ILTSL provides targeted 1-year grants to school libraries in districts where at least 20% of the students come from families whose annual income falls below the poverty line. A recently published report, *Evaluation of the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries Program* (www.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/other/libraries/intro.html), examines the positive changes that these schools have been able to make as a result of receiving the ILTSL grant. The report concludes that grant-recipient schools were able to improve their libraries whereas comparable schools that did not receive the grant made little or no changes.



The main data source for the report is a survey of 400 schools that received grant funding in 2003–2004, matched to another 400 schools that would have been eligible for grant funding but did not receive such extra funds. The survey asked schools to explain how grant funds were used. Overall, schools that received grants doubled expenditures for the school library. Schools spent most of their ILTSL grant funds (68%) on new print resources, on purchasing new hardware (11%), and on extending after-school library hours by adding staff (11%). Grant recipients were able to improve their collections by acquiring more books in 2003–2004 than those of nongrantees (averages of 1,250 and 730 books, respectively).

The survey also reported that locally funded expenditures were not negatively affected by the receipt of the federal grant. Grant recipients reported that they were able to increase operational hours—and thus student access—to increase weekly per-student visits and assistance to students on research projects, as well as to provide new or expanded after-school library programs and new and expanded work on curriculum issues.

When compared to nongrantees, grantees reported a greater degree of collaboration on reading and language arts and on curriculum development between classroom teachers and teacher-librarians. As well, teacher-librarians in grantee schools reported that they were more likely to work with their principals on curriculum issues. Grantees were also more likely to have library-related professional development—especially activities related to methods of collaboration.

What do we know, and what conclusions can we draw?

- Targeted funds do reach children directly and are used to buy critically needed books for kids.
- The funds seemed to supplement—not supplant—local funding of school libraries.
- Access to materials that children want to read makes a difference in their achievement. If the grant now makes these materials accessible to children, then the program is making a positive impact on achievement.

• There is a tremendous need to provide this targeted funding to many more school libraries so that they can make reading resources available to children who have no access to books in their homes.

This report provides evidence that grantee schools have made significant improvements in their school libraries. Although one-shot funding initiatives of this type are appreciated, we know that sustained support over years is required to make a difference. The ILTSL program grant provides only 1 year of funding to a small number of schools. How can the number of schools that receive grants be increased? How can improvements in grantee schools be sustained? It is evident that Congress needs to substantially increase the program's overall funding in order to provide grants to many more schools and to provide multiyear grants to ensure sustainability.

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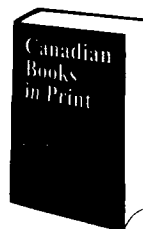
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