School Library Media Center Statistics:

A Progress Report [rogers]

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The efforts of a number of individuals and organizations to gather relevant and reliable nationwide data which accurately describe the status and needs of school library media centers are beginning to produce results. Much progress has been made in the last year in collecting and making available good data gathered from large national samples. The facts concerning the conditions in our school libraries are becoming clearer. Reliable data which demonstrate that school library programs need to be enhanced nationwide are beginning to surface.

Within the last year the education community and the library profession were provided with some interesting and important data in reports of several surveys about school libraries. They include a study done by the American Library Association published by the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science and a report published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). A discussion of the context in which these were carried out and an analysis of some of the data are the subjects of this "Progress Report." Also discussed are some indications that those who focus research efforts on library services to youth in schools are enjoying increased visibility and cooperation within organizations which gather data about libraries.

I.   A "Fast Response" From School Librarians
In recent years education reform, redefining educational goals, and setting priorities for support among competing educational programs have come into focus as important public policy issues, not only on the national level but also on the state and local levels. Redefining the role of the school library media center in a changing school environment and trying to garner support for library programs to insure that they are able to fulfill their educational missions are two challenges which school librarians face. In trying to make a case for support for school library media programs, by l993 it had become clear to researchers and the library profession that data available about school libraries were not adequate to demonstrate the needs (l,2). Deliberations on Capitol Hill about priorities and funding for school programs, including the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act were proceeding. The large national NCES surveys of school library media centers and media specialists already had been tested in a "pilot" survey in l990-91, and NCES was in the process of collecting school library data as part of the l993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey. This information was in the pipeline, but these reports could not be prepared quickly. Something had to be done--and fast.

In a remarkable cooperative effort between the American Library Association and the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science a survey was conducted in the fall of l993. Intended to provide a "snapshot of the condition of school library media programs," key items from the NCES Schools and Staffing Survey were selected to be sent to school library media specialists in l300 schools in twelve states. While not strictly a national sample, the twelve states chosen do represent the four regions of the country, the North Atlantic, Great Lakes and Plains, the Southeast and the West and Southwest.   They also represent states which have been involved in education reform and states where

Congressional delegations have shown interest in Federal programs related to education reform and school libraries. Given the time constraints, a decent response rate of 53.6 percent provided the data for the report.   In record time PUBLIC SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTERS IN 12 STATES; REPORT OF THE NCLIS/ALA SURVEY was published (3). In the report NCLIS Chair Jeanne H. Simon, highlights some of the Commission findings that:

*many school libraries are poorly equipped to support instruction
*1/2 of elementary school libraries buy less than one book/student/year
*1/2 of secondary school libraries buy less than .33 book/student/year
*almost no school libraries have access to the Internet computer network
*there is wide variance in average annual funding for school libraries
elementary from $15-$58,874; secondary from $155-$100,810
*in 31 % of elementary and 21% of secondary school libraries the latest world atlas has a copyright date before l990
*much work is needed to provide opportunities for school library media specialists to work more closely with classroom teachers. (4)

Four pages of brief observations about materials, expenditures, technology, and working with teachers complete the introductory part of the report.

The body of the report provides 26 tables for each state and a summary of these tables for the l2 states. When looking at the data in this report, one should keep in mind that it cannot be used to generalize beyond its universe. That is, the information relates to a relatively small sample of schools within twelve states. Most tables are based on a sample of 323 elementary schools and 343 secondary schools.

Even with its limitations, however, some of the numbers, are compelling.   For example, data demonstrate a serious problem with currency of materials in health and medicine and in space exploration (5).   Table 1: "Percent of schools by years with average copyright date of books" summarizes some findings from the report.

TABLE 1
PERCENT OF SCHOOLS BY YEARS WITH AVERAGE COPYRIGHT DATE OF BOOKS

	on HEALTH/MEDICINE		on SPACE	
Decade	Elementary	Secondary	Elementary	Secondary
1990s	13	11	17	7
1980s	52	58	58	61
1970s	31	29	19	34
1960s	5	4	5	8

It seems safe to say from these numbers that much of the information which students and teachers need about health/medicine would be missing or at best misleading in most books in libraries in the survey.   One could reach the same conclusion about books on space. Budgets for materials in both book and newer electronic formats are not adequate to provide timely information on current events and developments.

The infusion of life into school libraries with funding for materials provided by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in the l960's and l970's was essential to their viability. Many school librarians see a similar need today. Some progress was made on that front with the passage of the reauthorization of ESEA.   ESEA, Title III, Part F earmarks funds for school library resources. This part of the Act was not funded for fiscal year l995, however. Particularly in light of the changes which have taken place in Congress, it is difficult to predict the probability of future appropriations. Hopefully this and other survey data will help to convince legislators and school planners of the needs of school libraries.

School libraries are trying to provide advanced technology and services as one can see from some of the data summarized from information in the report (6).

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS WITH COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY AND SERVICES
PERCENT BY GRADE LEVEL

Equipment/Services	Elementary	Secondary
Computer with modem	38	26
On-line database searching	8	26
Database searching with CD-ROM	37	66
Periodical indices, encyclopedias, etc. on CD-ROM	54	7

Table 2: "Number of schools with computer technology and services percent by grade level" reveals that relatively few schools currently have the equipment and software to deliver much computerized information to students. One wonders also how much individual access there is to technology-based information in these school library when data for the twelve states reveal that 79% of elementary schools and 54% of secondary schools surveyed have ten or fewer computers in the school library (7). The average number of CD-ROM titles held at the end of l992-93 was 4 in elementary schools and 6 in secondary schools. Microcomputer software items averaged 90 for elementary and 36 for secondary (8). The average number of students using the library media center in a week was 496 for elementary and 798 for secondary (9). This adds up to much potential demand with few resources, especially when considering that the actual number of users is only a portion of the total school population.

Other interesting information in the study relates to scheduling patterns and frequency of work with teachers to develop units in various disciplinary areas.   In sixty eight percent of

elementary schools all classes are scheduled.   The reverse is true in secondary schools where ninety percent have flexible scheduling (10).

Of elementary library media specialists surveyed, thirty percent or more report that they never work with teachers to develop units in arts and humanities, English, foreign language, guidance, health/physical education, math, and vocational/technical education (11). Thirty percent or more also report that library collections are poor in terms of both currentness and quality in fine arts, foreign language, geography, health/guidance/parenting, math and vocational education/careers (12).   On the secondary level thirty percent or more do not work with teachers in health/physical education, math, and vocational/technical education (13). On the secondary level thirty percent or more report library collections are poor in currentness and quality in foreign language, geography, math, science/technology, and vocational education/careers (14).Given the reported problems with currentness and quality of collections in certain areas of the curriculum and the apparent lack of consultation with librarians of teachers in some areas of the curriculum, it seems that school library media programs are having a difficult time meeting the needs of students in those areas.

II.   A Preview from NCES

For several years, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has been working on a new approach to gathering and providing data on school libraries based on a national sample which will allow one to generalize about school libraries nationwide. Much to the credit of Carrol Kindel, the library statistics program officer, and Jeffrey Williams, the library statistics project officer, school library data began to be collected as part of the formidable and well respected Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). NCES had gathered school library data in the past, but they had done so on an irregular time-table and separate from other school surveys. Characteristics of the reports even made it difficult to make state by state comparisons. The first effort to integrate school libraries into the SASS was in the 1990-91 Schools and Staffing Survey which included a "pilot" survey of school libraries collecting selected basic information about school libraries from fifty states and the District of Columbia. The inclusion of school libraries in the SASS is important not only because the SASS is the most comprehensive survey of our schools but also because it is nationally representative and is designed to provide both national and state-level estimates for public and private schools.

A report of some of the data from the "pilot" survey, SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTERS IN THE UNITED STATES: 1990-91, was published at the end of 1994 (15). It focuses on three issues: the number of schools with library media centers, slmc staffing levels, and the role of the slmc and its staff. Drawing information from other NCES surveys, it also provides some historical comparisons.

Historical data show that there was a great increase in the number and percentage of schools with library media centers in the 1960's and early 1970's. By 1978/79 eighty five percent of public and eighty three percent of private schools had library media centers. Numbers increased in the 1980's with ninety six percent of public and eighty seven percent of private schools having media centers in 1990/91 (16). These decades also saw a large increase in the number of school library media specialists, but staffing levels began in the 1990's not to keep

pace with the increase in student populations (17). While a few states have had a decrease in the number of school librarians at the end of the 1980's and into the 1990's, the figures in an historical summary of the number of public school librarians by state from 1959-1991 do not show a trend of year over year decrease in staffing numbers (18).

Even with staffing numbers holding their own through the early 1990's the survey for the l990-91 school year shows that 27.6 percent of public schools were without a full-time librarian and without a full-time aide. For private schools the percentage was 67.9 (19). Over eight million students were in schools where the library media center was understaffed according to national professional guidelines of one full-time professional librarian and one full-time aide. Some school libraries were not only understaffed but unstaffed. Of public schools with library media centers 8.1 percent had neither a librarian nor an aide. For private schools the percentage is 47.5 (20). For public and private schools combined, the average number of librarians per school for l990-91 was .9; average number of aides per school was .6. There was one librarian for 545 students and 33.5 teachers (21). In the following nine states, more than one third of the schools with library media centers had no librarian: Alaska, California, Idaho, Massachusetts, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Utah (22).

Professional literature and preservice education stress the importance of the integration of school library media resources and services into teaching. Planning for library related activities and materials which can support teaching objectives involving the librarian working with the teacher can be viewed as one measure of activity related to this integration. The report tells us the percentage of teachers who "strongly agreed," defined as 1 on a scale of 1-4, that they planned with librarians to integrate slmc services into their teaching. In public elementary schools 30.6 percent "strongly agreed" that they consulted with librarians. In secondary schools the percentage was 27.1. Combined with private schools, about thirty percent of teachers "strongly agreed" that they planned with librarians. A slightly larger percentage, 35 percent, agreed that library materials were adequate to support teaching objectives (23). There appears to be a gap between what librarians believe or atleast are taught is an important function for the school librarian and what librarians do or are able to do with teachers on the job.

The influence of school librarians in "establishing" curriculum was the subject of a question asked of principals. Only 15.8 percent of principals (chief school administrators) in public and private schools reported that librarians had a great deal of influence over establishing curriculum. This is not particularly surprising or disturbing when you consider the fact that most library media specialists view their role as a curriculum consultant whose responsibility it is to provide information to the teaching staff about the materials and services currently or potentially available to support the curriculum rather than as a curriculum setter. As curriculum is placed more in the hands of school based decision making teams, the librarian's role here may expand. According to this l990-91 survey, the group viewed by the largest percentage of principals as having a great deal of influence over establishing curriculum was still the state department of education (61.3 percent). Only fifty one percent of principals viewed teachers as having great influence. The principals viewed principals themselves as having great influence almost as frequently with 49.1 percent. Principals reported that

school or governing boards also had great influence 46 percent of the time.   The only group reported to have great influence less frequently than school librarians was the parent association which had great influence only 7.7 percent of the time (24).

This report of some of the data gathered in the l990-91 "pilot" survey is limited to three basic types of information: availability and staffing of media centers and two facets of the role of the media specialist.   It sets the stage, however, for the school library part of the l993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey which included questionnaires about the slmc and about the school library media specialist. The two parts include:

Library Media Center Questionnaire
facilities
collections
equipment
technology
staffing
income
expenditures
services

Library Media Specialist/Librarian Questionnaire
academic background
work load
career histories and plans
compensation
perceptions of the profession
perceptions of the workplace

Several of these areas never before have been the subject of a national survey.

III. School Libraries and Data Collectors
Good data are needed to make good decisions about education and the school library media center's role in the educational process.   While one might assume that state departments of education regularly and systematically collect much information about school libraries within their states, several studies reveal that this is an incorrect assumption (25). Some individual researchers such as former American Association of School Librarians President Marilyn Miller and her colleague Marilyn Shontz have surveyed every two years a small selected sample of school librarians nationwide concerning expenditures in school libraries (26).   But the extent of information needed to be gathered nationally to provide an accurate picture of the many facets involved in delivering library services to youth in our schools demands resources beyond those available to independent researchers. The assumption of responsibility by the National Center for Education Statistics to gather more in-depth information about school libraries nationwide and their new approach in gathering the information as a part of the Schools and Staffing Survey promises more and better information beginning with the l994-94 integration of school library information in the SASS. Also, those doing research on school library media centers and statisticians are no longer mutually exclusive sets.   They

have begun to collaborate to a much greater extent. The "pilot" survey of school libraries which was part of the l990-91 SASS was developed by NCES with the help of an ad hoc Statistics Committee of the American Association of School Librarians.   Although disbanded when that task was complete, it has been reestablished as a standing committee of the American Association of School Librarians partly to act as an ongoing resource for NCES and as a focal point in AASL for other data collection efforts.   The "fast response" survey described above made use of questions from the SASS "pilot" survey instruments and the expanded questionnaires of the l993-94 SASS.   The Director of the American Library Association Office of Research, Mary Jo Lynch, plus Ann Weeks and Pamela Kramer, staff officers of the American Association of School Librarians worked with NCES in designing and preparing the "fast response" survey discussed above.   More school "library types" are being invited to participate in activities of NCES.   The NCES Summer Data Conference brought together data gatherers and users of education and library statistics.   AASL staff and several school library researchers were invited to attend and present their work.   This cooperative and collaborative effort is beginning to provide better data which can be used for better planning and policy development at the local, state, and national levels.

The report of the l993-94 Schools and Staffing Survey sections focusing on the school library media center and school library media specialist/librarian will be made available during l995. The data will provide a national picture of school library collections, expenditures, technology, and services. The media specialist portion of the report will provide, for the first time, a national profile of the school library media work force. NCES plans to continue to collect school library data as a part of the Schools and Staffing Survey, with the next survey to be done during the l998-99 school year (27).

In bringing these efforts to fruition the first and most important link in the chain is the building level library media specialist who keeps good records and responds to requests for data. By participating in these surveys, school library media specialists can help to provide an accurate picture of state and national conditions and trends in school libraries. School libraries count in our efforts to reform and improve education.   They are standing up to be counted along with other components which contribute to the process of education in our schools.

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4.   Ibid. p. 2.
5.   Ibid., Table 16, Table 17.

6.   Ibid., Table 19.
7.   Ibid., Table 18.
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16.   Ibid., p. 9.
17.   Ibid., p. 10.
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