



"The philosophy of the new environment seemed so intuitive, almost a natural extension of our school environment."

# Washington State School Library Impact Study

## The Backstory

## How School Library Impact Studies Happen

CHRISTIE KAALAND AND CRAIG SEASHOLES

*In April 2015, the state school library organization, Washington Library Media Association (WLMA), released the Washington State School Library Impact Study (WSSLIT), by Dr. Elizabeth Coker, documenting the role of certified teacher librarians, library quality, and student achievement in Washington State Public Schools. A summary and the full report are available at <http://www.wlma.org/wlma-home> or by contacting the authors. While many school library impact studies have been conducted, the authors believe that the story behind how those results are obtained needed to be told. This article tells the backstory of one significant school library impact study.*

Washington school library advocates share a long history of political activism, which was launched in earnest in the fall of 2007 when the Spokane Moms marched on Olympia, determined to ensure that libraries were a part of the basic education laws of the state. Washington State school librarians have hosted legislators, picketed outside the capitol building when key legislation was on the table, participated in Library Legislation Day, and pushed for a seat at the educational decision-making table of every important governmental committee. In so doing, state policymakers see Washington librarians as serious activists regarding K–12 students' equitable access to school libraries.

Washington has also been fortunate to have some highly visible individuals who track legislation and move librarians to action when necessary. One of the keys to political activism requires the presence of a lobbyist. Washington Library Media Association (WLMA) employs lobbyist Carolyn Logue, who tracks all educational committees, discussions, and legislation. Logue keeps Washington school librarians in the know on all key state educational policies, not just those impacting school libraries and librarians. Her regular updates on the WLMA listserv keep librarians informed, and her constant visibility and vigilance remind legislators of a school library presence. In the journey to get a state study conducted, Logue educated WLMA members on the importance of constituency.

Logue reported,

You can tell legislators that 18 states have conducted studies that show the correlation between a well-funded school library program run by a highly qualified, certified librarian and high student achievement, and their response will likely always be, "So what? I want to know how students in *my* voting district are impacted."

Early on, Logue encouraged WLMA to pursue a state impact study, the results of which she could take to legislators to show how their districts' students are impacted by fully funded school libraries, thus affecting legislative decision-making when key issues around funding and policies are brought forth. From these initial conversations, WLMA members

Craig Seasholes, Jennifer Fukutaki, and Christie Kaaland were encouraged to pursue a state impact study.

The study from inception to results took three years, from June 2012 to June 2015. Seasholes, Fukutaki, and Kaaland initially met during the summer of 2012 to discuss survey content, including what the survey should measure, how to get support at the state level, and potential funding sources.

Conversations regarding content for the survey began in earnest during the fall and winter of 2012–2013. Various educational concerns played into these content conversations. One such dialogue revolved around Washington's current focus on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). These conversations happened simultaneous with the Washington State Library's receipt of an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) grant to train Washington school librarians to initiate instruction in leading Common Core training. (To date, over six hundred Washington teacher librarians have been trained.) This parallel focus prompted survey content questions related to Common Core.

During this same time, Fukutaki queried officials at the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and used her expertise in data-mining to draft a proposal to present to OSPI officials. In the fall of 2012, when Seasholes, Kaaland,

and Fukutaki met, it became evident that involvement of state stakeholders was needed to conduct such a large-scale survey. Seasholes contacted technology and library leaders at OSPI and set up a meeting to discuss the next steps. Dennis Small, educational technology director, OSPI, was in attendance and volunteered to shepherd the study forward.

By late winter, the group was prepared to meet with state officials to seek state-level support for conducting the study. In preparation, Seasholes gathered pertinent documentation (WLMA survey proposal, LIT document, one-page summary of other major school library impact studies) and assembled a web resource (<http://craigseasholes.edu.glogster.com/school-libraries-deliver/>). On April 29, 2013, Seasholes, Fukutaki and Kaaland drove to Olympia and met with OSPI officials, including Small.

Fukutaki, with assistance from Small, applied data and information from the white paper *Proposal for the Washington State School Library Impact Study* (Fukutaki and Kaaland, 2013) to begin drafting the survey questions. Small guided Fukutaki to locate and use current state data on the status of Washington school libraries. The proposal laid out existing impact study research, addressed recent deep cuts to Washington school library programs despite legislation to the contrary, and described the proposed study's methodology, cost, and survey content.

Mary Kay Biagini, University of Pittsburgh, and Debra Kachel, Mansfield University, Pennsylvania, had (then) recently orchestrated the Pennsylvania study, and these colleagues generously offered use of their survey questions. This act of collaboration greatly contributed to the speed with which the Washington study survey was developed. Further, both researchers contributed invaluable expertise, lessons from their recent study, and fine tuning of the survey questions. The Washington survey, or WSSLIT, as it became known, included many questions from the Pennsylvania survey.

During the 2013–2014 school year, one of Washington educators' greatest concerns was implementation of CCSS. With

---

## During the 2013–2014 school year, one of Washington educators' greatest concerns was implementation of CCSS. With implementation of these standards following the CCSS training, librarians would be expected to be leaders in delivering instruction and curriculum support.

implementation of these standards following the CCSS training, librarians would be expected to be leaders in delivering instruction and curriculum support. Therefore, several curriculum content questions included a Common Core focus. Fukutaki, Kaaland, Seasholes, and Small chipped away at the survey questions through the summer and fall of 2013. Many eyes, including then WLMA president Ann Bingham and president-elect Sharyn Merrigan, offered suggestions and edits.

Further support from Small's office came with the use of the state's Survey Gizmo account for administering the survey and a commitment to set the stage for a visit with the head of the state's education department, Superintendent Randy Dorn. Late Friday afternoon, December 20, 2013, Seasholes and Kaaland, accompanied by Small and several key WLMA leaders, met with Dorn in Olympia. Dorn spent nearly two hours listening to library advocates, and at the meeting's end he lent his support to the study with a commitment to generate a letter to all school district superintendents requiring their participation. This was a grand victory and later proved critical in the high survey response.

Winter 2014 became a frenetically busy time for the study, overall. Several components of the survey itself and planning for the generation of study results were being addressed simultaneously. OSPI officials from Dorn's office generated a "head's-up" letter of support to all school district superintendents requiring their participation. The survey was sent to a few librarians across the state who volunteered to pilot and give feedback. Seasholes fielded ques-

tions from those piloting individual school librarians, and more survey question adjustments were made. Survey questions were still receiving suggested additions, thus Seasholes and Small quickly (and wisely) administered a deadline. Deadline for submissions to the annual WLMA journal, *Medium*, loomed as the editor pressed for an article, to which Seasholes responded. Further deadlines, including the (then) upcoming WLMA conference session submissions' deadline, meant further burning-the-midnight-oil in order to prepare for presenting these results to the state's librarians. Seasholes promptly submitted the conference proposal.

The team also sought support from state impact study researcher Keith Curry Lance. Lance generously shared his expertise and offered suggestions with regard to administering the survey. Knowing the survey would require research expertise for data analysis, Lance and Kaaland attended the AASL's IMLS-funded research summit in Chicago to seek potential research support. Literally hundreds of emails were generated as Small, Fukutaki, Seasholes, and Kaaland honed and fine-tuned the survey instrument.

The email/letter from Superintendent Dorn (see appendix A) and the survey went live on February 28, 2014. It was imperative that librarians be contacted through as many means as possible to ensure the greatest number of responses. It was, therefore, extremely fortunate that Ron Wagner, WLMA membership chair, had just updated a master list of Washington's schools and school librarians. Wagner had a phenomenal grasp of the status and currency of

“who’s where” in Washington school libraries, and he also helped field library status questions. His list was used to announce the survey through the librarian database. Superintendent Dorn’s office and Small’s office also sent announcements and reminders statewide. As surveys were being completed, those involved—with the help of WLMA president and president-elect—fielded questions that arose from all interested parties (primarily librarians and administrators) across the state.

Then, as results came in, Seasholes and Wagner tracked which districts, schools, and libraries’ results were missing; they updated the tally, emailed reminders, announced counts regularly, and contacted area librarians who could urge colleagues to get counted. Seasholes and Wagner sent a flurry of emails beseeching librarians with the mantra “Get counted!”

It became clear that a survey results deadline needed to be set. Initially, March 24, 2014, was set as the deadline. However, the number of responses by March 17 indicated that more time was needed. Small pulled results from OSPI that showed nonresponse districts, and a variety of new strategies were implemented, including peer pressure: an email was sent through the WLMA region lists that urged those who had completed the survey to encourage others to do so as well. Finally, Seasholes and Kaaland began making phone calls urging participation. While this was a time-consuming and arduous task, it did bring further results. It also helped connect those working on the survey with many librarians in the field who had, for one reason or another, been less informed of the necessity for completing the survey. The deadline was extended, and more calls were made as surveys trickled in. One final participation strategy included checking that key library-supportive legislators’ districts were participating. Results could be used to later gain their legislative support or to share results with individual legislators.

Of course, some obstacles occurred. For example, this email from OSPI came out during that critical time: “As we were zeroing in on a Friday 28th extended deadline

for submitting the OSPI School Library and Information Technology survey, a cyberattack on the Survey Gizmo servers Wednesday has put any further submissions on hold.” But, for the most part, the survey distribution and collection was smoothly executed.

Soon daily—even hourly—extensions were implemented. Finally, when 1,810 responses had been filed, a final deadline (4/9) was announced and enacted. Small’s office reviewed results for accuracy and redundancy (in a handful of districts administrator and librarian had both filled out the survey) and whittled the total down to 1,492 reliable results. The final result of participation was 61 percent; that is, 1,486 of the 2,428 Washington public K–12 schools participated.

The next step was to tackle what results could be culled from the survey data. In the busy fall of 2014, Seasholes pushed everyone involved to consider seeking analysis swiftly in order to bring results to the upcoming legislative session. He submitted a WSSLIT data report posing the following questions:

What data do state legislators and education decision makers need as evidence that school librarians should be included in mandatory staffing for all elementary and secondary schools?

What information would persuade district and school administrators that school librarians and library budgets are critical to student success and important enough to include in their staffing budgets?

WLMA lobbyist Carolyn Coker Logue’s sister, Liz Coker (a University of Washington–Tacoma researcher) was hired by WLMA to complete the survey analysis in the winter of 2014. Coker had worked on developing the state database of school demographics, student success, health, and other statistics but had no experience working in the school library field. This lent a fresh perspective as to how data might be analyzed. Coker contacted Seasholes, Kaaland, and Small for clarification in definitions of terms, parameters of school library work, and state law certification regulations in order to ensure accuracy with interpretation of data. Coker

worked closely with the original team, using input and background information to revise and prioritize. Once again, hundreds of emails cross-circulated to hone, revise, and organize the data and the final report. Coker was able to complete the analysis in January and February 2015, in time to share results with legislators.

Throughout the writing of her report, Coker consulted and communicated with the survey team, but she independently created a unique library quality scale (LQS) to determine relationships between library quality and performance indicators. The LQS drew data from nine of the survey questions covering five categories, including open hours of operation, inventory (numbers) of print and database resources, available technology, scheduling, and assessment of program. Results of this analysis showed that “school libraries staffed by CTLs [certified teacher librarians] scored significantly higher on the library quality scale (LQS) than schools without CTLs” (Coker, 2015, p. 15) demonstrating that, overall, “it is the quality of the library facility and related instructional services rather than its presence or absence that makes a difference for student achievement” (p. 13). The full report can be accessed on the WLMA website at [https://wala.memberclicks.net/assets/WLMA/Advocacy/wslitreport\\_final%204\\_11\\_15final.pdf](https://wala.memberclicks.net/assets/WLMA/Advocacy/wslitreport_final%204_11_15final.pdf).

Winter 2015’s legislative session included three significant bills that addressed school library programs. Carolyn Logue pressed everyone involved to expedite completion of the report in order to ensure that reports could be distributed at the most opportune time and thus take advantage of and complement Washington State legislative activities. Minute edits were still happening as Logue finally convinced everyone involved that the final report *had* to get into the hands of legislators. On April 9, Coker submitted the final report, and WLMA received a generous donation from Mackin to help pay for a print run of the report. Even this last act took a collaborative and committed team, as boxes of printed reports were carried forth in a six-way handoff from printers to WLA to

## APPENDIX A

Fellow educators:

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Washington Library Media Association (WLMA) have partnered to build and distribute a survey to collect much-needed information about the availability of school library services. Data from every school building across the state will generate a valuable source of current information. The survey questions ask about library staffing, hours, inventory, technology, budget, scheduling, and curriculum and instruction.

The Washington State School Library and Information Technology Survey is posted at <http://ospi.2013-school-librarian-impact-study.sgizmo.com/s3/>.

To download and review the questions prior to completing the survey, go to <http://www.k12.wa.us/EdTech/Standards/teacherlibrarians/>.

OSPI is requesting that *all* schools complete this survey, whether you have a certified teacher librarian on staff, you employ a certified or classified employee to run the library, or even if you do not have anyone assigned to staff and run the library. Building principals should assign the most appropriate person to complete and submit the survey. The survey must be completed by Monday, March 24, 2014 at 5:00 p.m.

OSPI has released Memorandum 012-14M with additional information, which can be accessed at <http://www.k12.wa.us/BulletinsMemos/Memos2014/M012-14.docx>.

Dennis Small, Educational Technology Director, OSPI  
Old Capitol Bldg, PO Box 47200, Olympia, WA 98504-7200  
Phone: (360) 725-6384 FAX: (360) 586-7251 Cell: (253) 279-7641  
Web Page: <http://www.k12.wa.us> E-mail: [dennis.small@k12.wa.us](mailto:dennis.small@k12.wa.us)

Seasholes to Kaaland to Coker to Logue and into the hands of the legislators.

The seeds for WSSLIT were planted in Seattle area coffee shops in 2012. Dreams of a Washington State study that could truly demonstrate the impact of well-funded school library programs with certificated librarians took three years to come to fruition. The handoff of valuable data and insights to state legislators has been made. The journey continues with the recognition of findings and the influence of the results on key legislators.

## REFERENCES

Coker, Elizabeth. (2015, April). *Certified Teacher-Librarians, Library Quality, and Student Achievement in Washington State Public Schools: The Washington State School Library Impact Study*. Washington Library Media Association.

Fukutaki, Jen, and Christie Kaaland. (2013, April). *Proposal for the Washington State School Library Impact Study*.

Christie Kaaland, EdD, is a core faculty member at Antioch University Seattle, where she teaches in the teacher certification program and is the director of Antioch's school library endorsement program. She can be contacted at [ckaaland@antioch.edu](mailto:ckaaland@antioch.edu).

Craig Seasholes is an elementary teacher librarian in Seattle Public Schools and president-elect of the Washington Library Media Association. He is also serving as Region 8 director, representing Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington on the AASL board of directors. He can be contacted at [pres-elect@wlma.org](mailto:pres-elect@wlma.org).

# Make *TL* Your K-12 School Library Resource

## ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

US Subscriber

\$60.00

Canadian Subscriber

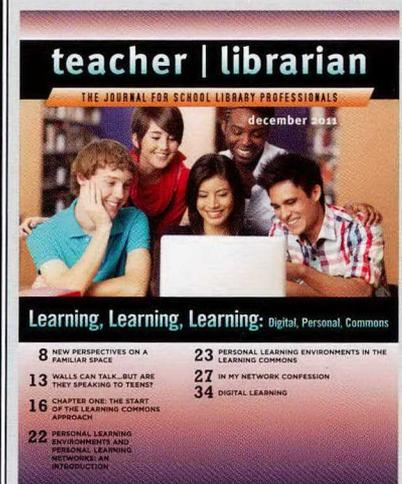
\$60.00

International Subscriber

\$75.00

## BULK SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Are Available. Please contact  
[subscriptions@teacherlibrarian.com](mailto:subscriptions@teacherlibrarian.com)



[www.teacherlibrarian.com](http://www.teacherlibrarian.com)

teacher | librarian

Copyright of Teacher Librarian is the property of EL Kurdyla Publishing LLC and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.