

“The administrators and teachers who participated in the SCASL impact study consistently endorsed instructional collaboration between librarians and teachers.”

Everybody’s Teacher

Administrators’ and Teachers’ Perceptions of School Librarians

Findings from the South Carolina Association of School Librarians Impact Study

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ABSTRACT

In late 2013, the South Carolina Association of School Librarians (SCASL) commissioned a study on the impact of school libraries and librarians in South Carolina. The purpose was to assess the extent to which school libraries transform schools by contributing to student success. The SCASL study, completed in 2014, was conducted by Dr. Keith Curry Lance and his associates at the RSL Research Group. Phase two of this study analyzed data collected in surveys of South Carolina school administrators, teachers, and librarians. This article presents the views of 273 administrators and 917 teachers who responded to the surveys. Among other findings, this article describes administrators’ and teachers’ perceptions of the school librarian’s role in collaborative teaching and leadership activities. Included are quotes from district- and school-level administrators. Findings indicate that administrators value the policies and practices of school library programs, as well as the collaborative teaching and leadership roles that librarians play in schools.

In late 2013, the South Carolina Association of School Librarian’s (SCASL) commissioned a study on the impact of school libraries and librarians in South Carolina. The SCASL study was conducted by Dr. Keith Curry Lance and his associates at the RSL[Q: spell out?] Research Group. The second phase of the study was an analysis of data collected in surveys of South Carolina school administrators, teachers, and librarians, as well as test results from the state’s Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) for elementary and middle school students. This article examines the perceptions of school administrators and teachers who responded to the survey. Seven hundred forty seven (747) administrators were nominated for the survey, and 273 (36.5%) responded. One thousand ninety four (1094) teachers were nominated for the survey, and 917 (83.8%) responded.

The surveys began with a few demographic questions. They were then asked to respond to questions regarding school library-related issues. The issues that will be featured in this article are:

- How highly administrators valued selected policies and practices of library programs
- Roles played by school librarians and how they were desired by administrators and perceived by teachers

The survey respondents were also given an opportunity to share their thoughts about their school library programs. More than 430 administrators, teachers, and librarians responded with success stories from their schools. An overview of the findings from the surveys, as well as some of the comments from the administrators and teachers, is provided below.

ADMINISTRATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL LIBRARY POLICIES AND PRACTICES

The administrators who participated in this study were asked to rate the importance of various policies and practices of school library programs. Were those policies and practices considered essential, highly desirable, desirable, or unnecessary? The findings revealed that five policies and practices were deemed essential or highly desirable by the large majority of responding administrators. In descending order of importance, they were:

1. Librarians and teachers designing and teaching instructional units together
2. Librarians providing in-service professional development to faculty
3. Librarians and principals meeting regularly
4. Access to the school library being scheduled on the basis of instructional needs rather than on a regular or required fixed schedule

(see figure 1).

The responding principals and other administrators consistently endorsed instructional collaboration between librarians and teachers. Furthermore, the following quotes from principals and vice principals suggest that they consider collaboration and coteaching best practices for a success-

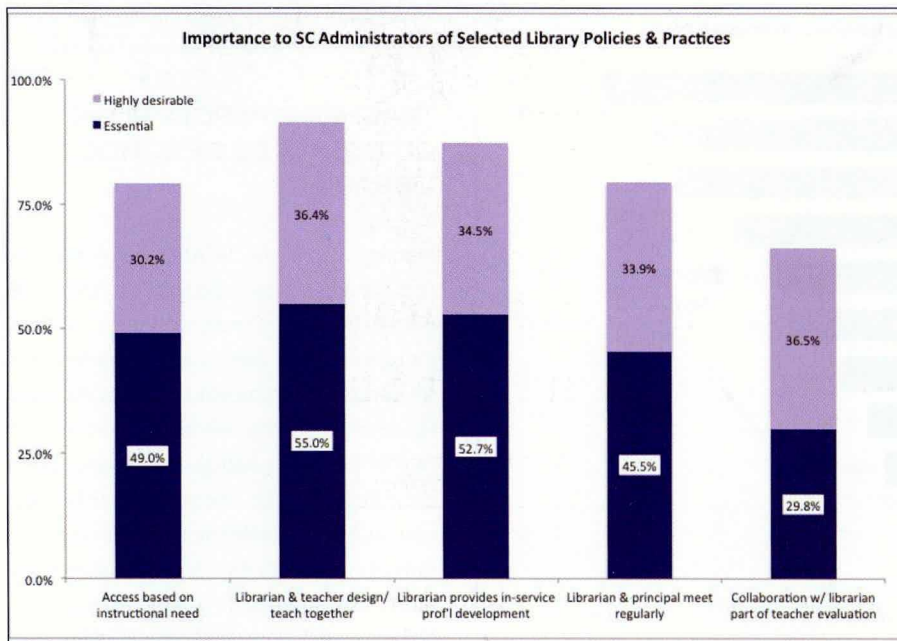


Figure 1. Principals addressing teacher collaboration with librarians in annual teacher evaluations

ful school library program.

• “The library/media center is truly the hub of our school. All content areas plan and coteach with our librarian/media specialist.”—Middle school vice principal

• “Our media specialist encourages collaboration, reflection, and discussion on all topics addressed in the state curriculum among our students and staff.”—Elementary school vice principal

It was also apparent, in the following success stories, that administrators valued professional development practices through which librarians taught instructional technology skills to classroom teachers.

Our two media specialists, along with our technology learning coordinator, work together as one incredible team. Most recently, they pitched an idea to me about redesigning the way

we do in-service and professional development in our school. I loved their idea. . . . I’m excited to see where this goes and happy to know that two media specialists are helping lead the charge.—High school vice principal

Providing instructional technology support for our district—which includes eight schools—would be very difficult without the support and collaboration of our media specialists. They are always great to work with, providing excellent help for teachers and working with students on technology projects.—District technology support administrator

ADMINISTRATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLES OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

When asked to rank the most “desired” roles they wanted school librarians to play in their schools, the majority of administrators listed them in the following order, from most important to least important: reading motivator, instructional resources manager, and coteacher. A smaller majority of administrators wanted their librarians to be an in-service professional development provider, school leader, teacher, and technology instructor. The least desired librarian roles included tutor of at-risk students, curriculum designer, and website manager (see figure 2).

Leadership is a top workplace skill that employers seek; therefore, it is not surprising that, among the most potentially desirable librarian roles administrators were asked about, the one with the most consistent findings was school leader. In fact, school leader was ranked as a desirable librarian role by 64.5% of respondents. In addition to wanting their librarians to play key leadership roles in their schools, administrators were also likely to wish them to play each of the other roles. In rank order, these roles included

1. curriculum designer
2. tutor of at-risk students
3. in-service professional development provider
4. teacher
5. technology instructor

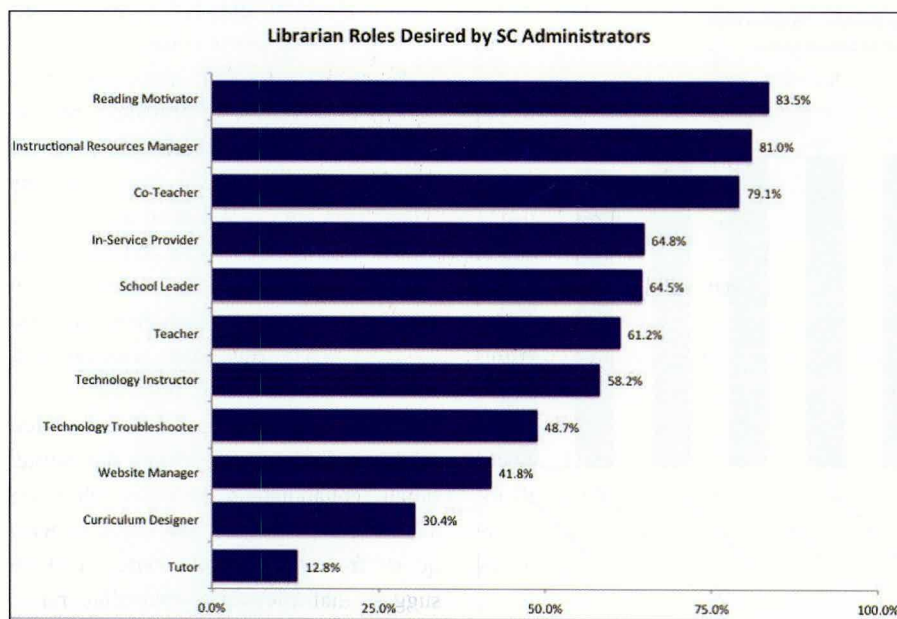


Figure 2

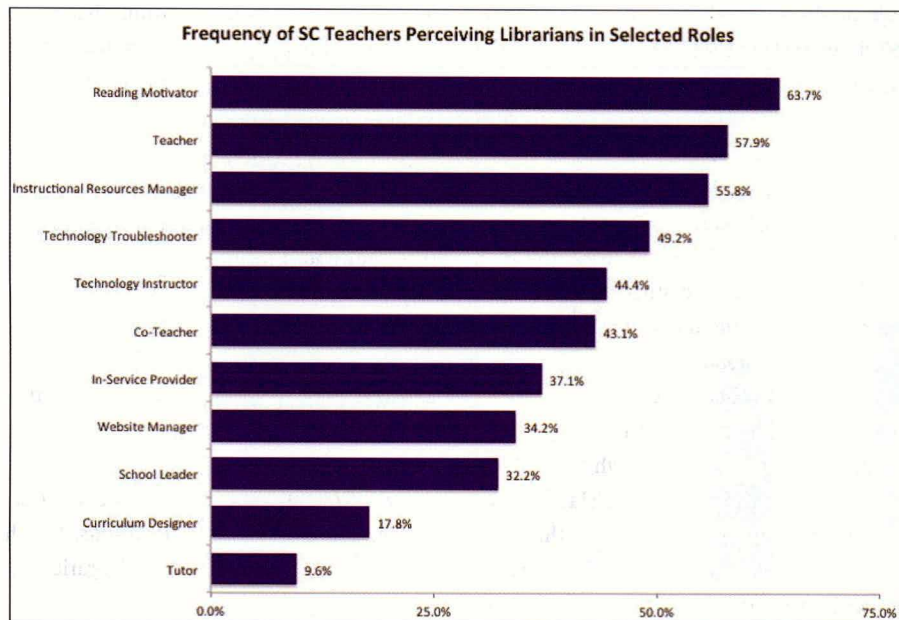


Figure 3

6. coteacher
7. instructional resources manager
8. reading motivator
9. instructional support
10. technology trouble shooter (see figure 4)

The following quotes from administrators provide examples of how administrators value the leadership role of their school librarians:

- “Our librarians are leaders in our district. . . . It is so wonderful to see [them] share

their passion for reading and learning not only with our students but with our teachers!”—District director of planning and development

- “My librarian is an instructional leader on our faculty. Teachers gravitate to her for assistance.”—Elementary school principal

- “Our media specialist provides a love of reading for our students while also being a leader in technology.”—Elementary school vice principal

It is apparent from the findings that school administrators’ perceptions of the value of librarians’ roles tend to coincide

with administrators’ assessments that library programs contribute to student success.

TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLES OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

Findings from the SCASL study revealed that teachers’ perceptions of the roles played by their librarians tended to favor more traditional ones, such as reading motivator and instructional resources manager. However, teachers also ranked the teacher role of librarians highly and in two different categories. The teacher role ranked second, at 57.9%, while the coteacher role was ranked sixth, with 43.1%. This suggests that most classroom teachers acknowledge their librarians as fellow teachers and colleagues. Other librarian roles perceived by substantial minorities, between a third and half, were, in rank order: technology troubleshooter, technology instructor, coteacher, in-service provider, website manager, and school leader. The least frequently reported roles were curriculum designer and tutor of at-risk students (see figure 3).

Much like the administrators in this study, the responses from classroom teachers imply that they had positive perceptions of librarians as coteachers and partners, across all grade levels. Three teachers’ comments about partnering with their librarians follow.

Our media specialist always encourages others to come to the media center, or [we] allow her to come to classrooms to teach a technology lesson on a topic/unit that the teacher provides. The children are paired together and given an iPad to research . . . a given topic. The students are . . . asked to answer written questions by reading and researching topics.—Primary school teacher

One of the most challenging standards that I teach deals with research, and I have received immense support from my media specialist every year I have been at this school. She spends nine weeks helping me with every step of the research project: note cards, outlines, rough drafts, bibliographies . . . everything.—Middle school teacher

I teach American Literature to several

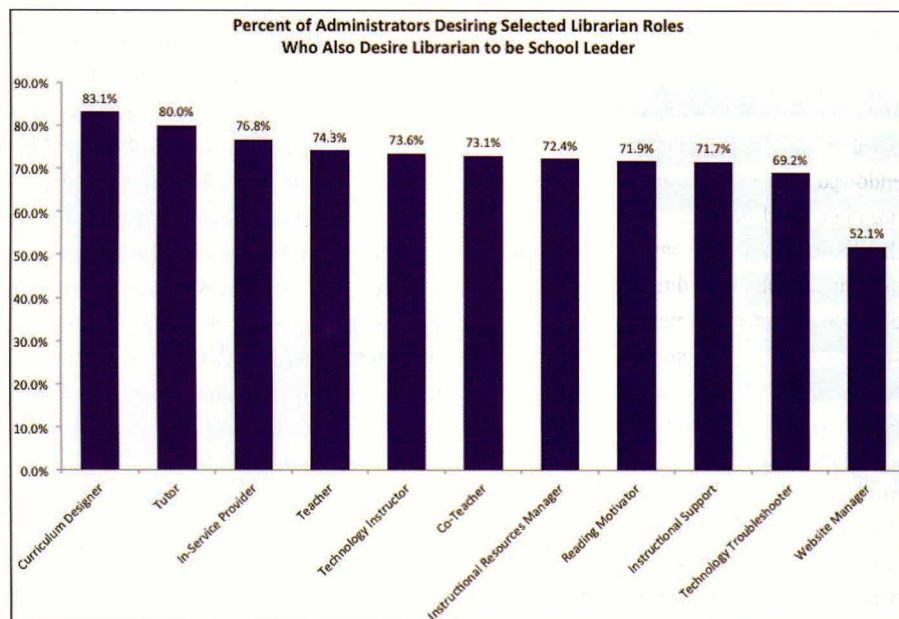


Figure 4

classes. Our unit on Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* requires deep analysis of the novel. Without my asking, our librarian offered a myriad of resources to help me get ready for teaching the unit. . . . I will be well prepared because of the support of my librarian.—High school teacher

These comments, describing librarians as supportive teaching partners, promote the perception of librarians as colleagues in the instruction of students, as well as colleagues who share their expertise with classroom teachers, to the benefit of the teachers and their students.

COLLABORATION

Both administrators and teachers consistently commented on the value of instructional collaboration between librarians and teachers. They frequently referred to collaborative activities, such as classes visiting the library, teacher-initiated collaboration with librarians in classrooms and the library, and librarians teaching new skills to teachers. Librarians were often recognized as model teachers when they collaborated with teachers, both when students were present and when they were not.

Many administrators and teachers who participated in the study felt that their librarians provided quality instruction within the walls of the library and beyond. Librarians were also recognized for collaborating in other ways. For example, one principal touted his librarian's success as a grant writer, as well as her work creating a collaborative learning commons environment at their school:

Our media specialist is a coteacher in our school. She has written and been funded on several grants to provide materials for a . . . unit of study that supported our school's STEM program. Our media center is a learning commons with updated furniture that can be rearranged by students to fit the collaboration we stress.—Middle school principal

Some of the participating teachers believed that learning was "made more powerful" when they collaborated with their

school librarians. The effectiveness of some of these instructional partnerships is described below by three classroom teachers.

[Our LMS] was excited to share a program with me that would allow each student in my class to create a book about the states of matter using an iPad. She came into the classroom to demonstrate the program to the students and helped me get everyone started. . . . We had some great books about the states of matter!—Elementary school teacher

My media specialist helped me plan and execute an activity where students were "stranded on a desert island." They had to create pleas requesting that food be sent to them . . . [and] had to research various minerals and the importance of these minerals to the human body. . . . My media specialist helped organize the informational texts students would use for research, helped film the students as they made their pleas, and helped organize and assist during the research process.—Middle school teacher

During the last school term, I taught physical science and had a new idea [so] I approached the librarians [about] presenting the lesson with me. The ideas, resources, and instruction they provided enhanced both the activity outcome and the learning. I think the instruction was made more powerful because of the collaborative effort.—High school teacher

CONCLUSION

The administrators and teachers who participated in the SCASL impact study consistently endorsed instructional collaboration between librarians and teachers. They also valued the leadership roles that librarians played in their schools. In addition, the importance of the teaching and coteaching roles of the school librarian was apparent throughout the survey responses and the participants' comments. Whether librarians were recognized for teaching an information literacy lesson to students, providing professional development sessions to teachers, or coteaching the curriculum, many of the teachers and administrators viewed school librarians as "everybody's teacher." Finally, and perhaps most

importantly, the findings from this study suggest that participants were united in their belief that librarians and library programs contribute to student success.

For a full edition of the two-part SCASL impact study, as well as an infographic and video, please go to <http://www.scasl.net/the-south-carolina-impact-study>.

REFERENCE

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Keith Curry Lance is a consultant who works with libraries and related organizations as a researcher, statistician, public speaker, proposal writer, and facilitator. He was founding director of the Library Research Group at the Colorado State Library in 1987. Since retiring from that position in 2007, he has focused on consulting both independently and with the RSL Research Group. Lance is best known in the school library community as the principal investigator of the most prolific research team studying the impact of school libraries and librarians on academic achievement and student learning. For more information visit www.keithcurrylance.com.

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