

Link found between spending on libraries and student learning

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It is an article of faith among many critics of public schools that there is no correlation between spending and learning outcomes. But it's not so—at least where library spending is concerned.

When support for school libraries rises, reading scores go up and learning by other measures increases also. That's what researchers at Mansfield University in Mansfield, PA found when they examined and summarized the results of 23 studies done around the United States and Canada.

"Quality school library programs impact student achievement," says Debra E. Kachel, a professor in the School Library and Information Technologies Department at Mansfield University. "The research shows clearly that schools that support their library programs give their students a better chance to succeed."

Kachel and a class of graduate students examined school library impact studies, most done in the last decade, by 22 states and one Canadian province (Ontario). Most examined student standardized test scores. A few used qualitative approaches. All found positive links between library support and learning. The paper, "School Library Research Summarized" was done this spring for the Pennsylvania School Librarians Association.

Among the findings: a California study in 2008 established a strong positive relationship between school library budgets and test scores in language arts and history. In Illinois in 2005 a study found that

elementary schools which spend more on their libraries average almost 10 percent higher writing performance. For middle schoolers the average was 13 percent higher.

A Pennsylvania study in 2000 learned that schools that spent more money on their school library programs had higher student achievement on reading scores. And a 2004 Minnesota study discovered a statistically significant relationship at the elementary level between higher reading scores and larger school library budgets.

Although poverty remains a primary force in determining student academic success, the studies in state after state showed that socio-economic conditions could not explain away the impact of school library programs. A Wisconsin study in 2006, for example, found that the impact of a robust library media program in high school was almost seven percentage points greater than the impact of socio-economic variables.

"In fact, quality school library programs may play an even greater role for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds," says Kachel.

Adequate staffing also correlates with student achievement. In Ontario in 2006, the presence of a school librarian was the single strongest predictor of reading enjoyment for students in grades three and six. In 2010, a New York State research project found that elementary schools with certified school library media specialists were more likely to have higher English language arts achievement scores than those in schools without certified library staff.

The studies also showed that incremental increases in the following can result in incremental increases in student learning: increased library hours and group visits by classes to the library; larger collections with

access as school and from home; up-to-date technology; more [student](#) use of school library services.

"School leaders should to recognize this research and foster school library programs that can make a difference," says Kachel.

More information: "School Library Research Summarized" is now a booklet and a website. Both can be found here: library.mansfield.edu/impact.asp.

Provided by Dick Jones Communications

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