

Revisions in Instruments and Methods from Texas to Wisconsin to Measure the Value of School Library Media Programs

An Interview with Ester G. Smith Conducted by Daniel Callison

Ester G. Smith has been the principal investigator for two major state studies on the impact of school library media programs.

The study in Texas was completed in 2001; find out more at the [Texas School Library Standards Homepage](#) and in [Texas School Libraries: Standards, Resources, Services, and Students' Performance](#).

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Data Collection

The Wisconsin study used an online survey method that allowed us to survey all library programs instead of a sample. It also allowed us to select a large sample of schools for the student and teacher surveys. The library questionnaire we used was the one that Keith Lance originally developed. It was modified (especially the technology section) to reflect changes in technology and use of technology in Wisconsin schools. The data provided by the library media specialists was supplemented with data on the school size (students and staff), student and staff composition and staff experience.

The Texas and Wisconsin studies highlight different staffing, service and operations models. These differences include:

- presence or absence of public school library standards;
- library stability or transition; and
- service model.

Presence or Absence of Public School Library Standards.

When Should a State Decide to Conduct a Library Study of this Type?

The timing of the study is very important and can have a critical impact on the strength of the outcomes. The optimal time for conducting a study associating library resources, operations and services with student performance is during a “stable” period; that is during a period when libraries’ resources have not changed in a while and where library resources vary with variables such as school size and type of school (elementary, middle, high). A review of the studies performed in the last decade shows that in many cases states conduct such studies when they become alarmed by library staff reductions and budget reductions (affecting their collections, operations, and services). In some of the states, the studies were performed after a period of such reductions, where libraries reached a bare minimum status staffing and resource wise.

I hypothesize that when these studies are conducted during a period of resource and service reductions, the relationship between library resources, services and operations, and student performance is probably masked and certainly weakened. The relationship is masked because it may take a while for student performance to “catch up” with lower or less available resources.

Furthermore, the Wisconsin case studies go beyond the accepted model of the librarian as a teacher of technology and research skills. The case studies demonstrate very dramatically the librarian impact on the quality of teaching and on the quality of class content. The best practice librarian also transcends the typical boundaries between classroom teacher and librarian, assuming duties that are traditional teacher duties, such as teaching students how to think, how to synthesize and analyze information, how to interpret information and data, and how to write clearly and persuasively.

2. Describe the case study method you employed in Wisconsin. How did those cases influence the description of school media services in that state above and beyond just numbers?

The five schools selected for case studies were chosen from schools that responded to the library survey. We identified three groups of schools (elementary, middle, and high) that met or exceeded certain library media program resource (staff, hours of operation, library items per student) and student performance (on the Wisconsin Concepts and Knowledge Examination) criteria. Meeting or exceeding these criteria indicated the presence of a best practice library media program. Staff of Wisconsin's Division of Libraries, Technology and Community Learning reviewed the lists and selected library media programs they recognized as best practice programs. The final selection of five schools was balanced to represent different geographical locations; school sizes; and urban, suburban, and rural settings.

Data from the five programs were collected through detailed interviews, document review, and observations. We conducted one-day visits to the five schools interviewing the principal, library media specialist(s), teachers, and students. In addition, we collected data and documents from each program on activities and projects.

The case studies highlighted issues that the library questionnaire either did not address or on which it offered very little information. The case studies enlivened the library media programs and their role in the school. They showed what a good library media program can do and what impact it can have on teachers and students and on the quality of instruction and learning. The case studies provided rich and detailed information on components that make a library media program an effective program:

I included a summary from the Wisconsin Case Study Report on what makes a viable library media program.

The Personality of the LMS

The library media specialist (LMS) is the major asset and driver of the library media program by sheer personality. The LMS is the program. Principals, teachers, and students from the five library media programs all commented on personality traits that make the LMS such a force. These personality traits include the ability of the LMS to work productively with teachers and students; his or her ability to relate to students as people, her ability to understand their mind set and motivate them; her high expectations from students, and her caring and sympathy.

teachers, raise expectations, and increase student interest. Teachers consider the library media specialist a “transformation agent,” one who is not afraid “to push the envelope.”
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The Library Media Center Is the Heart of the School

In the five schools visited, the library media center (LMC) is the hub and heart of the school. According to one principal, *“This is the heart of the school, and it pumps blood out throughout the school.”* The LMC is positioned as a place of instruction and learning where teaching and learning are ongoing throughout the day. *“The LMC means ‘try new things’ it’s a learning environment,”* according to teachers. According to principals, *“Our LMC is a living, breathing space ... Our LMC is ingrained in the school everyone depends on it.”*

In fact, the demand for class visits is typically greater than the ability to accommodate the number of teachers wanting to bring their students into the LMC. Inability to meet demand is a combination of limited space and limited staff. One of the library media programs offers a sign-in book spanning the whole year: due to great demand, teachers have to schedule class visits far in advance of the unit. In other programs, teachers stop at the LMC every morning before school starts to see if any space has opened up. Teachers are eager to take their students *“because students want to be in the LMC”* and they know the benefits to students of collaboration with the LMS.

The energy emanating from the LMC is due to its being such a popular place, not only with classes but also with individual students. The LMC in the schools visited is a warm, inviting, safe, and exciting place to be for students. For many students the LMC is a place of choice because of its atmosphere and resources. According to students, *“If you’re feeling stressed out, you can go there and get help and do schoolwork it’s a relaxing place to be ... Our library has a big choice of books there must be one that you’ll like ... Our library rocks! ... There’s something on everything that you can think of.”*

One of the attractions the LMC holds for students is the program’s ability, due to the efforts of the LMS, to accommodate and meet the needs of all students, including special education students and reluctant readers. Principals and teachers both commented on the uncanny ability of the library media specialists to “hook” students who express no

result of frequent LMS-initiated communication and principal observations when “walking through” the school library media center. Principals have great respect and admiration for their LMS and hold her in high regard: *“I have trust and confidence in the LMS for sound ideas ... Our LMS makes the difference.”* Principals clearly recognize the capabilities of the LMS and her valuable contributions: *“She knows the curriculum and initiates communication and planning ... She is the best-versed standards person in the school I rely on her.”* They value her as a key asset to the instructional program and support her by providing funding, removing barriers, and facilitating her visibility through membership and attendance in committees and faculty meetings. *“She’s an active and valuable member of our team.”* The principals, like teachers and students, recognize her unique contributions: *“Her strength is collaboration with teachers. She understands how to teach well and listens to others ... She’s very proactive with teachers and seeks better ways to do things ... She shows students how to be active in their own learning.”* The principals also promote the library media program when and by holding meetings with faculty and

their library or operations or how their particular situation did not fit the kind of questions we asked or the type of data we requested.

The library survey of students and teachers conducted in Wisconsin did not allocate specific room for such comments, although both teachers and students who completed the questionnaire could comment on any item in the questionnaire. Again, the objective of these surveys was to portray the current state of their attitudes, perceptions and use of the library.

The interview guides used in the case studies conducted in Wisconsin and the format of the interviews were open-ended and “invited” both positive and negative comments as well as suggestions on how things can be improved. In the case studies, the adequacy of staffing and resources was repeatedly brought up as a factor having an impa

influence on the curriculum by helping teachers identify new sources of information, making the curriculum more relevant and affecting the quality of teaching and what is being taught.

Research should focus on the librarian as an agent of change and as a focal point for the integration of technology. Specifically, under what conditions is this l

but not in the Wisconsin analysis. No other state studies have bothered to illustrate the correlation data. Please describe what various correlations mean; why some are termed strong, weak,

SLMR readers may read further about scatter plots and examine the normal interpretations of correlation strengths at these Web sites:

Scatter Plots, general definition: www.mste.uiuc.edu/courses/ci330ms/youtsey/scatterinfo.html

See changes from weak to strong correlation scattered data, and adjust input data to see the changes in line of best fit at Scatter Plot and Line of Best Fit:

<http://argyll.epsb.ca/jreed/math9/strand4/scatterPlot.htm>

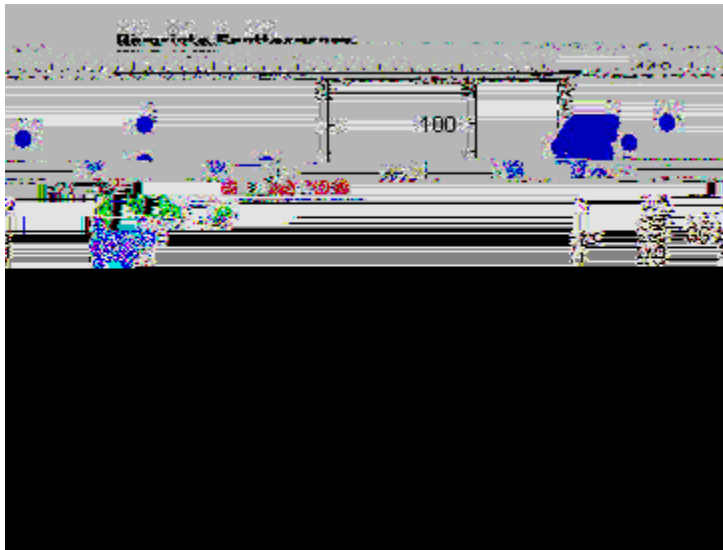
Appendix. Elementary Schools

Ten library and school variables were associated in the multiple regression analysis with TAAS performance of elementary school students. These include:

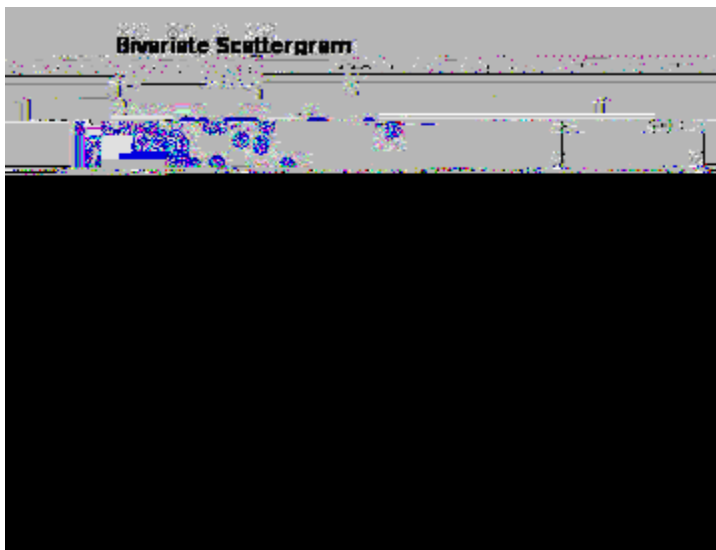
- Library computers connected to a modem per 100 students
- Library software packages per 100 students
- Number of volumes purchased in 1999-00 per 100 students
- Library operational expenditures per 100 students
- Percent of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students
- Percent of economically disadvantaged students
- Percent of white students
- Percent of Hispanic students
- Percent of African American Students
- Percent of Asian American students

The relationship shown in the following graphs is largely nonlinear. At the lower levels of each of the library variables there is greater variance in TAAS performance than in the high levels. As

Graph IV.6—TAAS Reading and Library Operational Expenditures Per Student



Graph IV.7—TAAS Reading and Library Modems Per 100 Students



Graph IV.8—TAAS Reading and Library Software Packages Per 100 Students

In some of the following graphs that associate TAAS performance with student characteristics such as percentages of students with limited English proficiency (LEP), economically disadvantaged students, white students, Hispanic students, African American students, and Asian American students, a definite linear relationship is seen. The linear relationship is particularly clear between TAAS performance and the percent of economically disadvantaged students and white students. The percent of students meeting minimum expectations on TAAS tends to decrease as the percent of economically disadvantaged students increases. The variance in TAAS performance also shows an interesting increase.

Graph IV.10—TAAS Reading and School Economically Disadvantaged Percent

