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School Library Services

Vague State Laws and a Lack of Monitoring Allow School Districts to Provide a Minimal Level of Library Services

Background

California school districts are required to provide library services to their students and teachers. School districts can provide library services by employing a teacher librarian, contracting with county offices of education or public libraries, or using classified staff to provide certain services. Teacher librarians must hold a valid teaching credential and complete an additional credentialing program approved by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (Teacher Credentialing) to be authorized to provide students and teachers with a broad range of library services that noncertificated staff cannot provide. Though the law does not dictate the level of library services school districts must provide, the State Board of Education adopted model standards and regulations related to school library services in 2010.

Our Key Recommendations

- The Legislature should define the minimum level of and types of library services that schools must provide and authorize Teacher Credentialing and county offices of education to ensure that classified staff do not perform duties that require certification.
- School districts should strengthen their library programs by using the model standards to assess and address their needs when developing their annual funding plan.
- County offices of education should provide guidance to their school districts about library services and reporting to the Department of Education (Education) annually.
- Teacher Credentialing should strengthen its monitoring of staff assignments by working with Education to identify potential misassignments by annually comparing data collected by both agencies.
- Education should redesign its annual library survey to better assess school libraries statewide and work with the State Board of Education to raise awareness of the model standards.

Key Findings

- Because the law does not define the level of service and the model standards are not mandatory, the schools we visited provide students with varying levels of library services.
 - » The school districts generally provided fewer types of library services to students in their elementary and middle schools than to students in their high schools.
 - » Schools that employ teacher librarians provide more types of library services than do those that do not employ teacher librarians.
 - » Two of the school districts had not fully assessed their needs in relation to the model standards while the third district was not even aware the model standards exist.
- State and county agencies perform limited oversight of school library services.
 - » We found 111 individuals over a five-year period who did not appear to be credentialed yet were reported as teacher librarians.
 - » Although Education annually surveys schools about library staffing, accessibility and educational materials, it does not collect data needed to assess the extent of library services that schools provide.
- The number of teacher librarians employed statewide is much lower than the number the model standards recommend—in fiscal year 2014–15, California averaged one teacher librarian for every 7,400 students rather than one full-time teacher librarian for every 785 students as recommended.
 - » There is not a strong incentive to pursue a teacher librarian credential—the pay increase, if any, is low compared to the cost of the required coursework.

Though the National Student-to-Teacher Librarian Ratios Have Increased, California's is the Poorest of the 50 States as of Fiscal Year 2013–14

STATE	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	STUDENT-TO-TEACHER LIBRARIAN RATIO	NATIONAL RANKING
New York	2.7 million	1,089 to 1	32
Texas	5.2 million	1,119 to 1	34
Florida	2.7 million	1,277 to 1	36
Illinois	2.1 million	1,442 to 1	43
California	6.3 million	8,091 to 1	50