

## INDIANA STUDENTS DESERVE HIGH-RATED SCHOOL LIBRARIES

by Jack W. Humphrey



According to William Bainbridge, president of School Match, a firm that helps individuals and corporations evaluate 15,892 public school systems and 14,855 private schools; the level of expenditures for library and media services has the highest correlation with student achievement (*New Jersey School Board Association Newsletter*, 1995). Keith Curry Lance (2004) of the Colorado State Library found that schools with higher rated libraries have 10 to 18 percent better test scores than schools with lower rated libraries.

The Middle Grades Reading Network's stakeholder group drafted an action plan for the state concerning school libraries. In that plan, *Becoming a Community of Readers: A Blueprint for Indiana* (1995) they argued for important actions that would vastly improve school libraries. These actions were that the state should provide categorical funds for books, that the state should allow and encourage the use of the Capital Projects Fund to purchase books, that school libraries should purchase two books per student per year, and that Performance-Based Accreditation should include school library staffing, book acquisition rate, and circulation of library materials.

The Indiana Administrative Code, 511 IAC 6.1-5-6 Media Program states that each school shall spend at least eight dollars (\$8) per student per year from its 22200 account to maintain its media program. This was set in 1989 when the average cost of a book was around \$9 compared to the present average cost of \$19.31 (St. Lifer, 2004). For example, according to the administrative Code, a school of 500 students should be purchasing \$4000 worth of books, or 207 books. This is less than one half book per student. Schools should be purchasing two books per student per year (Middle Grades Reading Network, 1994).

Holland and Humphrey (2004) found that the per student circulation of middle, junior, and high school library books was lower in 2003 than in 1992 while the average book expenditures per student were about the same in 1992 and 2003 despite the fact that book costs increased over 100 percent during that time.

Plucker (2004) of the Indiana Education Policy Center reported that 13.9 % of schools that responded to a survey from the Middle Grades Reading Network had no budget at all for books in 2004. Were these schools and their school corporations breaking Indiana state law? Unfortunately, they were not, for salaries of library media personnel can also be taken from the 22200 account.

The Indiana State Reading Association Board of Directors (2004) passed a resolution in support of funds for school library books. They support efforts to increase the minimum annual spending required for school library media collections in each school building from \$8 to \$16 per student and restoration of the Library Materials Grant Program. This requirement would exclude taking salaries from the 22200 account so that such funds would be spend on materials to support the idea that reading is a skill that requires practice for both maintenance and improvement.

Everhart (2000) ranked states by the number of students per school librarian. With 1512 students per school librarian, Indiana ranked 47th. The median for all states was 766 indicating that Indiana would need to double the number of school librarians available to students just to be average for the nation.

The Indiana General Assembly recognized the importance of updating school library book collections by appropriating \$4 million for K-8 schools during the 1997-1999 school years, \$6 million for K-12 schools during the 1999-2001 school years, and \$6 million for K-12 schools for the 2001-2003 school years. Regrettably, only \$3 million was provided in the 2001-2002 school year and no funds have been provided since that time.

Plucker (2002) provided the following conclusions and policy implications concerning the K-12 School Library Printed Materials Grant:

1. State funding for school libraries from 1998 -2001 resulted in a substantial increase in book purchases and circulation. The Library Materials Grant Program had a quick and direct impact on the availabil-

ity and quality of materials available to Indiana students, resulting in greater levels of circulation and independent reading.

2. Book purchasing appears to have a cumulative but potentially short-lived effect on circulation: The reduced level of state funding for school libraries in 2001-2002 resulted in a decline in book purchasing. This decline may explain the relatively small increase in circulation during the most recent school year, 2001-2002. Lack of targeted funding may erode circulation numbers, eventually impacting reading achievement.
3. The library materials program appears to be associated with a number of positive student outcomes, including increased use of library materials, increased student ownership of school libraries, higher levels of independent reading, and higher reading achievement. Despite the state's considerable financial constraints, the role of library materials should be considered in any comprehensive plan to increase the literacy of Indiana's students.
4. The range of books purchased across all K-8 schools during 2002 is large: some school purchased no books, while others purchased many books per student. Were the program to continue, greater resources should be devoted to program oversight to ensure that the funding is being used to put books in the hands of Indiana's students.

Plucker (2004) of the Indiana University Center for Evaluation & Education Policy examined the grant's impact on K-8 schools and issued a report entitled *Trend Analysis of Indiana K-12 Library services Since the School Library Printed Materials Grant*. The report provides the following conclusions and policy implications:

1. State funding for school libraries from 1997-2001 resulted in substantial increases in book purchases and circulation that were reflected in the 2000 data on the number of books purchased per school and per student. Subsequently, with a new pool of printed materials available to students, book circulation per school rose substantially as reflected in 2002 data. Book purchases per school and per student declined dramatically from 2000 to 2002, reflecting the consequences of the exhaustion of state funding for printed materials, the rising costs of books, and increasing school enrollment that reduces purchases per student.
2. The data collected in 2004 reveal that book purchases per school and per student remained relatively flat compared to 2002 figures. This finding suggests that schools have been unable to rebound from the loss of state resources for printed

materials first evident in the 2002 figures. However, with the elimination in state funding from the Printed Materials Grant, librarians have been extremely resourceful in identifying alternative sources of funding, apparently preventing further decline in the number of book purchases per school and per student. These funding sources are not necessarily stable or long-term, however, and many librarians report compromising their services to maintain essential book purchases (i.e., purchasing paperback rather than hardback materials, dropping periodicals, etc.). The nature of current funding suggests that book purchases may decline significantly in the future as short-term funding solutions end and attention is diverted back to essential library services.

3. After a surge in circulation in 2002 associated with book purchases from the Printed Materials Grant, circulation dropped off dramatically in 2004 to per-student levels that were even slightly below 2000 levels. Declines in circulation may be expected when purchases of library books decrease, as students lack library access to new reading materials.
4. Literacy continues to be a central focus of educational initiatives in Indiana schools, and librarians report increasing difficulty in meeting student needs and educational goals related to literacy. In order to support programs such as accelerated reading and other literacy initiatives, librarians have been forced to submit grant proposals, collect pull tabs, host book fair, and sponsor candy sales. Whether these types of efforts will be sustainable is questionable.
5. Despite the state's considerable financial challenges, the role of library materials should be considered in any comprehensive plan to increase the literacy of Indiana's students. Resources for the support of school libraries are increasingly strained, making it difficult to support critical academic and student needs. The long-term impact of budget cuts may have negative outcomes on student reading levels and achievement.

Excellent school libraries are essential if we are to ensure that all Indiana students have access to the reading resources that will help them to gain high levels of reading achievement. Excellent school libraries employ licensed school library media specialists and have enough funds to purchase two books per student per year, along with an appropriate supply of current magazines and newspapers. Any serious strategy to combat the failure to support Indiana school libraries will require more resources and thought than the problem is currently receiving. Taking on these challenges will not be easy, but attention to school libraries

must be at the heart of any comprehensive plan for improving reading skills.

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