

# Vermont School Libraries Report - September 2023

Provided by VSLA - the Vermont School Library Association

## **Staffing in Vermont School Libraries**

As stated in Vermont Agency of Education's (AoE) Education Quality Standards, 2121.2. Staff - "The services of a certified library media specialist shall be made available to students and staff. Schools with over 300 students shall have at least one full-time library media specialist and sufficient staff to implement a program that supports literacy, information and technology standards. Schools with fewer than 300 students shall employ a library media specialist on a pro-rata basis."

AoE Data from 2021 showed 202.8 school librarians in the state. Not all of these are full time positions. Data for library support staff showed 68.63 employees. While the numbers of school librarians has remind about the same over time (2008 numbers showed 220 librarians in the state) the number of library support staff has dramatically decreased. In 2008 there were 136 library support staff in the state while today there are only 68.63 - an almost 50% decrease in library support.

## **Information about organizational structures in Vermont School Libraries**

Because there is no uniform definition of what makes up a school in Vermont there is no uniform organization of librarians in each school. Many smaller, more rural schools tend to share a librarian. One school librarian may work at two or three schools. Other schools employ one full time librarian. Some of the larger schools in the state have more than one full time librarian on staff. Some of our school libraries have support staff, however many function without support staff and all duties are carried out by the school librarian.

## **General overview of services**

Vermont school librarians wear many hats in their schools. On any given day you may find a school librarian serving as:

### **A Reading and Literacy Leader:**

- Demonstrating a deep knowledge of a wide range of children's, young adult, and professional literature in multiple formats to support reading
- Engaging and motivating students to read for academic success, personal interest and lifelong learning
- Developing a collection of reading and information materials that support the diverse developmental, cultural, social, and linguistic needs of all students and their communities.
- Promoting reading for pleasure and information that demonstrates understanding, diverse viewpoints, and genres
- Collaborating with classroom teachers to help students create meaning from text

### **A Teacher/Instructional Partner:**

- Designing, teaching, and assessing learning opportunities that include inquiry, critical thinking, and multiple literacies to prepare learners to be college and career ready
- Empowering students to be skillful researchers, technologically literate, ethical users of information.
- Collaborating with other teachers as an instructional partner in learning opportunities
- Modeling the integration of technology in teaching and learning

### **An Information Specialist:**

- Developing and maintaining a collection of resources in support of and appropriate to the curriculum, learners, teaching styles, and instructional strategies used within the school community and in accordance with district policy
- Cooperating and networking with other librarians, libraries, and agencies to provide access to resources outside the school
- Understanding and promoting the ethical use of information: copyright, fair use, and licensing of intellectual property
- Evaluating, promoting, and using existing and emerging technologies to support teaching and learning,
- Connecting the school with the global learning community, and provide equal access to library services

### **A Leader:**

- Advocating for equitable access to information for all learners in the school community
- Serving on school and district decision-making teams
- Measuring and evaluate the school library program according to school, state, and national standards
- Creating a resource-rich physical and virtual environment conducive to active and participatory learning
- Researching relevant and current professional practices and emerging technologies
- Planning and providing professional development
- Maintaining active memberships in professional associations
- Advocating for school library programs and the role of the library program in the community

### **A Program Administrator:**

- Creating and maintaining a flexible teaching and learning environment that is inviting, safe, and conducive to student success
- Establishing policies and procedures for selection, acquisition, circulation, resource sharing, etc. that ensure appropriate resources that are available when needed
- Developing school library program goals and objectives that are aligned with school and district long-range strategic plans for improved student learning
- Preparing and administering the school library program budget
- Managing resources and facilities for continuous improvement of the library program; scheduling access to the space.
- Participating in the recruiting, hiring, and training of other professionals, educational library assistants, students, and volunteers
- Gathering and analyzing data to improve instruction and demonstrate correlations between the School Library Program and student achievement
- Ensuring equitable physical access to school library facilities by providing barrier-free, universally designed environments

### **A Technology partner:**

- Assisting students and teachers in the use of innovative and new technology
- Acting as liaison between building staff and IT departments
- Identifying repairs that require support and troubleshooting when appropriate
- Assisting in managing technology distribution, collection, and repair systems

## Information about AoE support past and present

The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided support for establishing school libraries, and as far as we know, that was reflected in Vermont through the Department of Education (DoE) hiring a School Library Consultant sometime in the late 60's. From the beginning, the role of the School Library Consultant was coordinated with the Department of Libraries (DoL), but paid through the DoE. They worked closely with the DoL's Children's and Young Adult (YA) librarians. They teamed up to preview new titles for purchase at quarterly meetings for school and public librarians. Meetings were held in public and school libraries or at the regional libraries in the state. The consultant also represented Vermont school librarians at regional, state and national conferences, and was the advocate in the DoE and presented concerns in the VT legislative committees, or at the local level at schools.

At one time, the consultant position had some staff and tech support provided through the DoE. There was also an "audio visual" consultant, later tech consultant, that aligned with the School Library Consultant. That job morphed into the AoE Tech Consultant position. Leda Schubert was the last School Library Consultant for the Vermont DoE and served for 17 years (1986-2003). As the Vermont School Library Consultant Leda would provide support for school librarians around library programming, weeding their collection, helping with material challenges (we were reminded that the 1990s was a period of intense pressure on banning books as well). She consulted with other state groups, such as the Vermont NEA, in the creation of summer reading programs. She advocated for school librarians to be included in the first writing of the Education Quality Standards in 1999-2000. Over time, the position was reduced from full time to part time and eventually phased out in 2003.

Losing an advocate and a voice within the DoE/AoE was difficult for Vermont School Libraries. As a result, beginning around 2021 the VSLA reached out to the AoE and began meeting monthly. These meetings were used, at first, to advocate for the adoption of new [AASL Standards for Learners \(2018\)](#), which has not yet occurred. We continue to meet monthly during the school year to discuss issues around library advocacy and have an open line of communication with the AoE. Lisa Helm is our current contact within the AoE. While we now have a positive working relationship with the AoE we still do not have the active services that were provided by the former Library Consultant.

## Additional Things to Note

Vermont School Librarians are supported in their work by VSLA, our state ALA/AASL affiliate. Earlier this year, the [VSLA submitted a report to the Working Group on the Status of Libraries](#). In that document, the VSLA responded to a variety of questions related to our organization. This document speaks specifically to our work with Vermont students, educators, and administrators.

VSLA is continuing discussions with the AoE in hopes of adopting our AASL national standards for learners. As with national standards for other content areas, these standards guide and unify the curriculum and content for not only students, but also for school librarians and library programs. Several other states, including New York, have adopted these standards. We believe that the adoption of these standards is even more essential because we don't currently have a librarian representative at the DoE to guide new librarians in the state.

We would like to highlight the staffing reductions for library support staff. The ~50% reduction in support staff for our Vermont School Libraries between 2008-2021 has had a large impact on what our School Librarians can do in support of our students. The Vermont Agency of Education's Education Quality Standards are clear when they say: "Schools with over 300 students shall have at least one full-time library media specialist **and sufficient staff** to implement a program that supports literacy, information and technology standards." (emphasis added). With a 50% reduction in support staff, many schools do not have "sufficient staff" to support their literacy, information and technology standards.