

INEQUITIES IN ACCESS TO LICENSED SCHOOL LIBRARIANS IN MASSACHUSETTS PUBLIC SCHOOLS: RECENT TRENDS AND DATA

MTA Task Force on Equity in PreK-12 School Libraries

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March 2020

SUMMARY

Introduction:

The MTA Task Force on Equity in PreK-12 School Libraries came about as the result of a New Business Item (NBI) put forward on May 5th, 2018 at the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) Annual Meeting (Doherty & Duffy, 2018). Several delegates who spoke in favor of the Task Force related stories about the lack of licensed librarians and library services in their own districts and their own children's schools, and the delegates overwhelmingly approved it.

This report is in partial fulfillment of this NBI, which calls for a report on the data gathered and analyzed by the Task Force regarding school librarian staffing in MTA locals. This report includes data collected and analyzed between October of 2018 and April of 2019.

Background and rationale for the Task Force:

Massachusetts has no requirements for school libraries or licensed teacher librarians, which is reflected in the ongoing deterioration of this essential learning resource and professional education field. In fact, according to a 2018 report issued by the Special Commission on School Libraries in Massachusetts, our state is second highest in the nation for loss of school librarian positions since 2007, with *at least* an estimated 13.3% of positions eliminated (Special Commission, 2018, p. 31).

Despite the fact that access to well-resourced school libraries staffed by professionally licensed librarians and adequate support staff has measurable, positive impacts on student learning, and that these positive impacts are increased for students of color, ELL students, and low-income students, librarian positions and services have been cut disproportionately in the districts serving these students (Lance & Kachel, 2018). As a result, access to well-resourced school libraries and certified librarians is increasingly becoming a luxury available almost exclusively to students in more affluent, majority white suburban communities, making this issue a matter of educational equity and justice.

From a workplace equity standpoint, the school librarian is the only licensed teaching position in Massachusetts public schools that is continuously outsourced to ESPs (Education Support Professionals, who aren't licensed to teach), to educators with other licenses, and sometimes even to volunteers. This situation de-professionalizes licensed teaching positions and exploits people who work for much lower pay, both issues that are of paramount importance to a labor union. ESPs who have replaced certified teacher-librarians are often put in the position of supervising 30 or more classes a week in order to provide classroom teachers' preparation coverage. This undermines the teaching role of the teacher-librarian and denies equitable opportunities for students to develop the multiple literacies that are fostered through a strong school library program. It's also unlikely that districts are in compliance with existing laws when they assign students to classes that are conducted by unlicensed individuals.

Charge of the Task Force:

The main charge of the task force was to gather, review, and analyze information from existing sources and MTA locals about the availability and staffing patterns of libraries/learning commons for students attending school in MTA locals, and to share the results in a variety of formats for the purposes of advocacy and bargaining, including an online toolkit. Staffing patterns to be considered included data about whether the libraries/learning commons are staffed by licensed librarians, ESPs, other staff, and/or volunteers. This report will detail the findings of this investigation and will also highlight patterns of inequities found along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines as called for in the NBI.

Task Force Composition:

In the fall of 2018, a ten-member Task Force representing a variety of locals from across the state was established. MTA's Center for Education Policy and Practice Division's Beverly Miyares, Director, and Gary Gilardi, Education Policy Specialist, provided expertise and support to the Task Force.

Task Force Members, 2018-2019:

- Nora Acevedo, Brockton, High School ELL Teacher
- Maya Bery, Carlisle, K-8 Teacher Librarian
- Kim Cochrane, Fitchburg, High School Teacher Librarian
- Erin Dalbec, Newton, High School Teacher Librarian
- Sue Doherty, Needham, Middle School Teacher Librarian (chair)
- Ted Intarabumrung, Roxbury Community College, Coordinator of Library Services
- Leslie Lomasson, Amherst, retired High School Teacher Librarian
- Claudia Palframan, Chicopee, Middle School Teacher Librarian
- Alana Stern, Wachusett Regional, High School Teacher Librarian
- Christine Turner, UMass Amherst, Scholarly Communication Librarian

Overview of the Data Considered, and Its Limitations

The first three goals of the NBI involved data collection and analysis.

1. Gather, review, and analyze information from existing sources and from MTA locals about the availability and staffing patterns of libraries/learning commons for students attending school in MA.

The Task Force collected, verified where possible, and analyzed existing data on staffing patterns and licensure status of school librarians in Massachusetts public schools and to a more limited extent, MTA locals. Task force members accessed, compiled, and analyzed data found in sources provided by the following organizations:

- Special Commission on School Libraries in Massachusetts
 - *Massachusetts School Library Study: Equity and Access for Students in the Commonwealth* ([Special Commission, 2018](#))
- Massachusetts Library System (MLS):
 - Statewide Databases: FY2019 (["Statewide Databases," n.d.](#))
 - MLS Membership: Home (["MLS Membership," n.d.](#))
- Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC)
 - Library Directory (["Library Directory," n.d.](#))
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE):

- DESE's 2017-18 Race/Ethnicity and Gender Staffing Report (DISTRICT) for Librarians and Media Center Directors by Full-time Equivalents (["2017-18 Race/Ethnicity," 2019](#))
- Special reports requested by MTA's CEPP division;
- Student demographic data for selected districts (["Profiles Search," n.d.](#))
- Public Lookup for Educator Licensure (["Public Lookup," n.d.](#))
- Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA);
 - MTA Locals List (login required)
- US Census Bureau
 - 2013-2017 American Community Survey, list of median incomes, as reported in the *Boston Globe* ([Reiss & Rocheleau, 2018](#))

The available data from existing sources on school librarian staffing was limited and often had inconsistencies that the Task Force members worked to resolve. We used our own knowledge of various districts and reached out to people in our networks with questions we had about the reliability of some of DESE's data on school librarian staffing; visited school websites to try to determine the state of their libraries and staff qualifications; and used DESE's licensure lookup tool to determine the licensure status of people listed as librarians on school library websites (["Public Lookup," n.d.](#)).

We did not conduct surveys of MTA locals because we were advised by MTA staff to begin with concentrating on existing sources of data. It might be useful in the future to consider conducting an MTA survey of locals, however, since we found that the existing data is limited, often incorrect, and incomplete.

2. Staffing patterns should include data about whether the libraries/learning commons are staffed by licensed librarians, ESPs, other staff, and/or volunteers.

We tried to determine this information from the existing data we reviewed, but it was not always clear since there is such a wide range of job titles in use for both licensed school librarians and for those who work in school libraries in other capacities. Data about ESPs working in school libraries is not publicly available, so we concentrated on licensed librarian staffing as we reviewed the existing data.

Unfortunately, there are numerous errors and inconsistencies in DESE's data on school library staffing, but since it is the only source of statewide data currently available we used it. When reviewing DESE data on librarian staffing, we found through outreach and prior knowledge that a number of districts reported ESPs as librarians, which is inaccurate since they do not have the professional licensure and education that librarians hold. Conversely, some districts that have licensed librarians working in all their schools did not report having any at all. We used websites, interviews, and our own knowledge of various locals to verify or correct some of the data available from DESE.

Another source of information we consulted to try to ascertain certified librarian staffing patterns was the MLS membership database because in order to obtain and maintain MLS membership (which provides schools with access to many free or drastically discounted e-resources), licensed librarians must provide copies of their current licenses each fall. We also used this publicly available membership list to cross-reference with district and local information to see which schools have memberships, helping us to get a clearer picture of which districts tend to employ licensed librarians and which do not. However, since some librarians may work in more than one school, the number of schools that are members does not necessarily match the number of

librarians in a district. That is information that would need to be gathered from individuals in a school district.

While we have not been able to achieve the goal of collecting staffing patterns for all people working in school libraries in all MTA locals, we were able to determine that a great deal of incorrect and incomplete data exists regarding staffing patterns in school libraries. In addition, the existing data indicates that a majority of Massachusetts public schools and districts do not currently employ licensed teacher-librarians with support staff.

3. Generate a report that details the findings of the above investigation. This report should highlight patterns of inequities along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines.

Although we were not able to gather complete and fully accurate information about staffing patterns in all MTA locals, we were able to find enough information through our analysis of existing data to show that there is a gross inequity of access to licensed librarians between high-income districts with a majority of white students, and low-income districts with a majority of students of color ([Doherty, 2019](#)).

For instance, in the top 26 high-income districts, where white students are in the majority, approximately 90% of the schools have a full-time equivalent licensed teacher-librarian, and these districts also often have ESPs supporting the librarians. Yet in the 26 low-income districts considered in this preliminary analysis, where students of color and ELL students are in the majority, approximately just 10% of the schools employ licensed teacher-librarians ([Doherty, 2019](#)).

MTA's CEPP division also generated data and graphs that further support the above conclusions. According to DESE's staffing data for 2017-2018, approximately just 33% of the schools in the state reported employing "librarians or media center directors." CEPP's graphs based on this data show that where "librarians or media center directors" are reported, they are distributed inequitably by income and by DESE's accountability levels, with schools that have lower accountability levels and higher poverty levels employing the fewest numbers in this position. Because DESE does not distinguish between licensed and unlicensed individuals when reporting this data, the actual percentages may be even lower than shown here ([Center for Educational Policy and Practice, Massachusetts Teachers Association., 2019](#)).

DATASETS AND ANALYSIS

The Massachusetts School Library Study: Equity and Access for Students in the Commonwealth ([Special Commission, 2018](#))

In 2014, in response to advocacy by Massachusetts School Library Association and state library organizations, the Massachusetts legislature created the Legislative Special Commission on School Library Services in Massachusetts in order to study equity of access to school library programs in our public schools. The Commission conducted a voluntary survey of public school districts and charter schools in order to ascertain equity in staffing, instruction, funding,

technology, information resources, and student access to school libraries and published a report in 2018 (Special Commission, 2018). The sections in the report on staffing are summarized here.

The survey garnered 521 viable responses from individual librarians or district administrators who responded voluntarily. Approximately 64% of the responses were from suburban schools, 25% were urban, and 11% were rural. 80.4% of the respondents reported having licensed school librarians in their schools; 12% reported non-licensed staff; and 11.7% reported paraprofessional (ESP) staff instead of licensed. They found no statistical difference in staffing across district types, with *at least* 20% of schools reporting not having licensed school librarians (Special Commission, 2018, p. 14).

As to inequities, they found that school size does not seem to increase staffing, with most schools who have licensed librarians employing no more than 1 FTE regardless of student enrollment. They also found inequities in support staff where there were licensed librarians. 61% of school libraries reported have no FTE support staff. The highest number of FTE support staff reported was 1, and that was found in only 17.6% of school libraries. Urban and rural school libraries reported significantly fewer FTE support staff than did suburban libraries (Special Commission, 2018, p. 14).

While the Commission Report was extensive and shone a light on the many inequities in access to school library services and resources in Massachusetts, the figure of 80.4% of schools having licensed numbers seemed high to us based on our own knowledge of the field and on what we found in other data sets. Self-selected respondents answering a voluntary survey means that it's possible that in many districts where there were no licensed librarians or where there was just one, no one from a district answered the survey. Therefore, we strongly support the Commission's goal of having DESE conduct an official audit of school libraries and librarian staffing statewide (Special Commission, 2018, p. 113).

Overview of DESE's 2017-18 data on Librarians and Media Center Directors (["2017-18 Race/Ethnicity," 2019](#))

DESE collects and reports on data for all public schools in the entire state. The only public listing of school librarian staffing data available on DESE's website is in the section on Staffing Data by Race/Ethnicity and Gender.

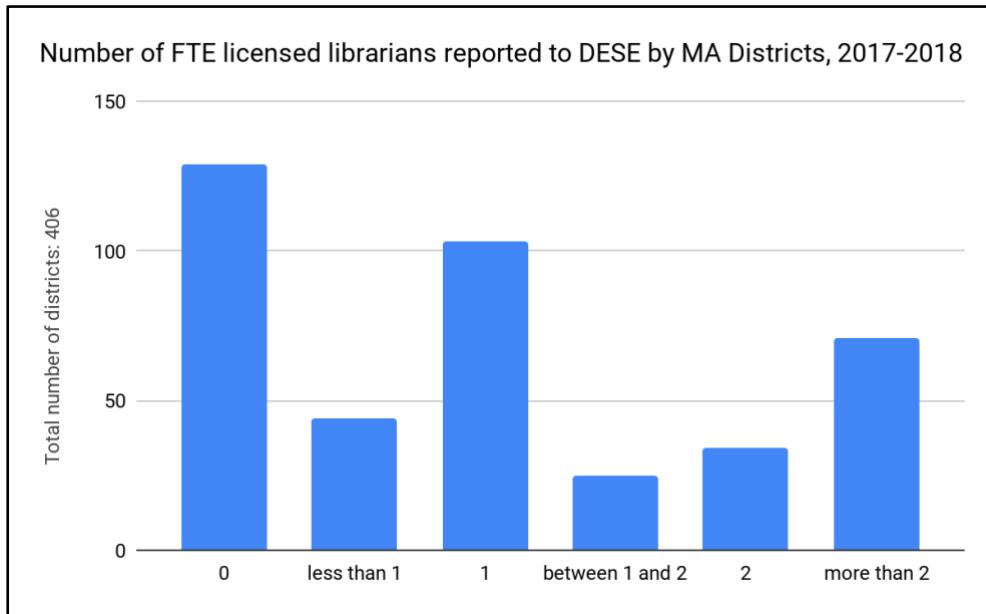
The path to get to this dataset from [DESE's home page](#) is Data and Accountability / School and District Profiles / Statewide Reports / [Educators: Staffing Data by Race/Ethnicity and Gender](#).

Once there, the user can view reports by district or school, by different academic years, by percentages or full-time equivalents, and by job classification. Librarians are found in the dropdown menu next to Classification as "Librarians and Media Center Directors." Once the report selections are made, the user needs to click "View Report" to see what schools or districts have reported to DESE for a given school year.

We looked at [2017-2018 \(exported spreadsheet linked here and above\)](#), the most recent available year when we were collecting data during the 2018-2019 school year.

2017-18 Race/Ethnicity and Gender Staffing Report by District – FTE Librarians and Media Center Directors Summary

- The number of public schools listed for 2017-18 was 1847. The number of FTE Librarians and Media Center Directors reported to DESE that year was 628.7. If each of these librarians worked full-time in one school, that would mean that only 34% of the public schools in the Commonwealth had licensed librarians on their staff.
- The number of districts listed for 2017-2018 was 406. (Note: Public charter schools are counted as both individual schools and districts.)
 - Very few districts reported employing more than 2 FTE librarians (17%). By sorting the data from the highest numbers of librarians to the lowest, it was clear that the districts in this category tended to be located in wealthy suburbs.
 - 34 districts (8%) reported having 2 FTE librarians.
 - 6% reported between 1 and 2 FTE librarians.
 - 36% reported having just .1-1 librarian.
 - 32% reported having no librarians, or did not report.
 - Most public charter schools do not report having any librarians on staff.



Questions and Inconsistencies

- It's not clear who they are counting when districts report this staffing data. DESE does not ask districts to distinguish whether the librarians and media center directors being reported are actually licensed teacher-librarians, paraprofessionals, teachers certified in other areas, or something else.
- We know that some of the district information is incorrect. For instance, in one task force member's district, 2 FTE librarians were reported to DESE, but she is the only librarian. Another example is Lowell, which listed 13 FTE librarians, but they have not had certified librarians other than at the high school for a number of years. They did have about a dozen ESPs running some of the libraries at the end of the 2017 school year, but they let them all go at the end of the 2017-2018 school year (D. Boyer, personal communication, February 27, 2019).

DESE Data on Librarian Staffing Statewide and by Income and Accountability Levels

[**\(Center for Educational Policy and Practice, Massachusetts Teachers Association., 2019\)**](#)

The MTA's Center for Education Policy and Practice (CEPP) used data reported to DESE to analyze licensed school librarian staffing by income level, accountability level, and overall across the state. Their report is reproduced below.

OVERVIEW

The DESE EPIMS (Education Personnel Information Management System) requires each school to report data on individual staff members, including job classification and assignments. The School Librarian category is included in the Job Classification data element. All data are from 2017-18.

Library staff

- In 2017-18, Massachusetts had 1847 public schools (including charter schools).
- Overall, 39% of schools reported an FTE library staff.
- 24% of schools reported at least 1.0 FTE library staff.

DESE provided additional data on the number of FTE librarians who are licensed.

Licensed Librarian staff

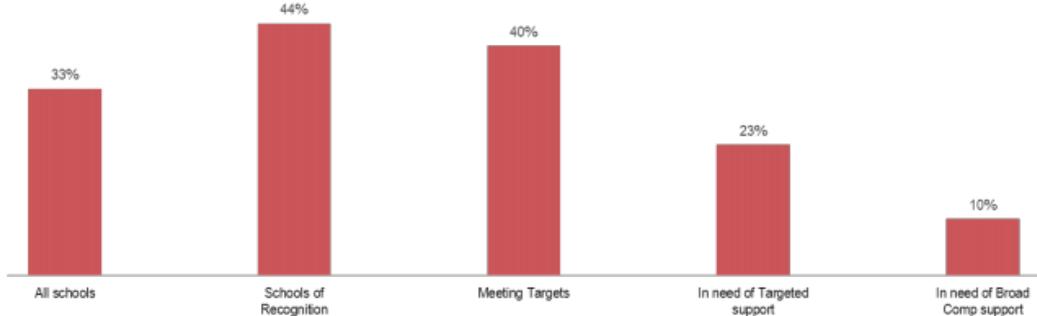
- Overall, 33% of schools reported an FTE licensed librarian staff.
- 21% of schools reported at least a 1.0 FTE licensed librarian staff.

These percentages differ by the performance level of the school and the demographics of the student population.

PERFORMANCE

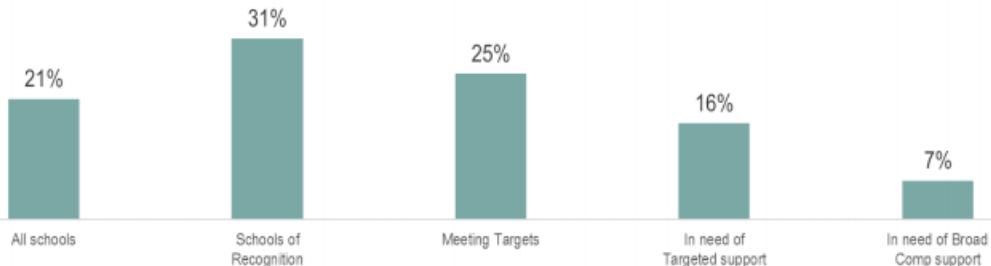
- 1624 schools have 2018 accountability determinations [based on MCAS scores, the accountability determinations were Schools of Recognition; Meeting Targets; In Need of Targeted Support; In Need of Broad Comprehensive Support]
- Schools identified as in need of support are less likely to have librarian staff and licensed librarian staff compared to all schools and to schools with higher levels of performance

Percentage of schools with licensed library staff
2018 Accountability Categories



- Only 7% of the designated underperforming and chronically underperforming [In Need of Broad Comprehensive Support] schools have at least a 1.0 FTE librarian.

Percentage of schools with at least 1.0 FTE licensed library staff
2018 Accountability Category



ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

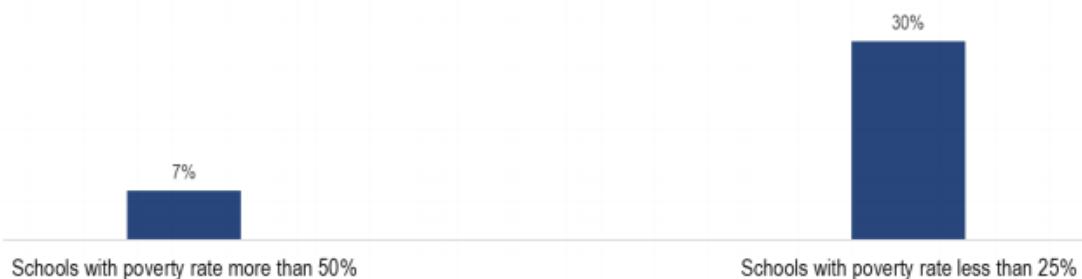
- Schools with high poverty rates are less likely to have librarians and licensed librarians.
 - 16 percent of schools with a majority of economically disadvantaged students report having librarians; 54% of low poverty schools (less than 25% of the enrollment) report having librarians.
 - The comparable numbers for the percentage of schools with licensed librarians show a large disparity –10% of high poverty schools report having a licensed librarian compared to almost 50% of low poverty schools.

Percentage of schools with licensed librarians
2018 Economically Disadvantaged Rate

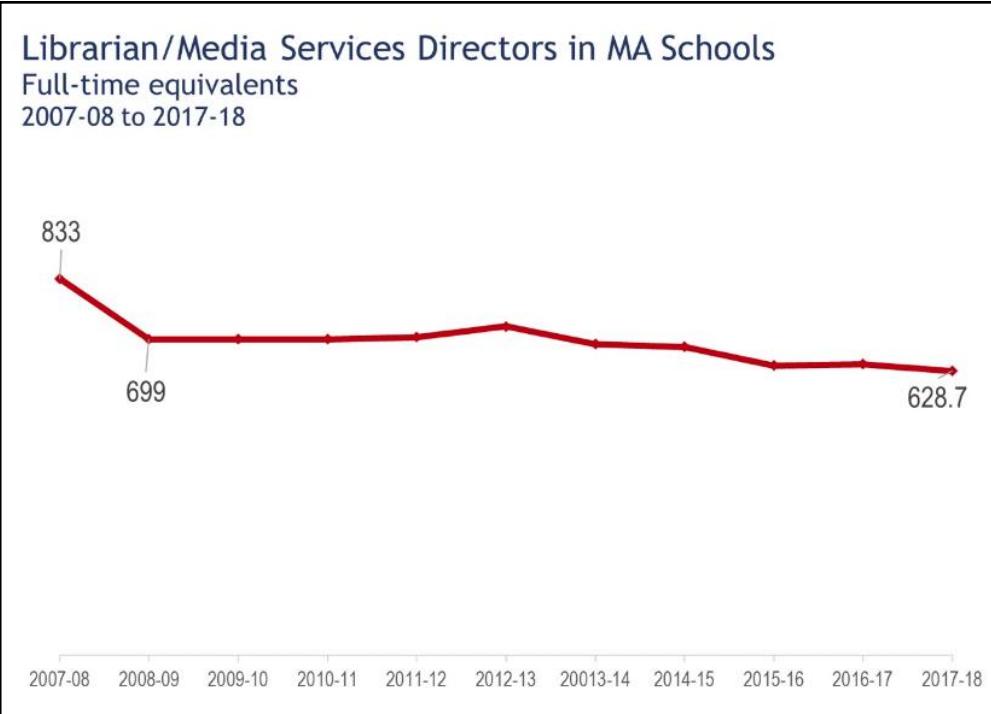


- Only 7% of schools with high poverty rates report having a 1.0 FTE licensed librarian; 30% of low poverty schools do.

Percentage of schools with at least 1.0 FTE licensed librarians
2018 Economically Disadvantaged Rate



In addition to the above report, CEPP published a blog post showing a 25% decline in the number of FTE Librarian/Media Services Directors reported to DESE between the school years 2007-08 and 2017-18 ([Center for Education Policy and Practice, Massachusetts Teachers Association, 2018](#)).



MTA districts cross-referenced with MLS data ([Bery & Miyares, 2019](#))

In Massachusetts, schools with a certified librarian are able to apply for free access to databases purchased at the state level by the Massachusetts Library System (MLS). These databases represent tens of thousands of dollars worth of resources, and provide students and educators access to high-quality, current, credible information.

Out of the 1560 members of the Massachusetts Library System, school libraries represent the largest group of users at 881, or 56% ("MLS Membership," n.d.). Because school librarians must supply their current employment and licensure information each year to the MLS in order to receive access to the free statewide databases and other resources for their schools, the MLS membership directory is a useful source of information for cross-checking what is available on DESE's website.

To get a sense of the presence of school librarians in MTA locals, task force member Maya Bery and MTA's Center for Education Policy and Practice director Beverly Miyares compiled a list of MTA locals, and used DESE's district profile data to list individual buildings in each local ("Local Associations," n.d., "Profiles Search," n.d.). This list was then cross-referenced against the MLS' publicly accessible membership library directory to see if the school had an MLS membership ("Library Directory," n.d.).

The results of this data set paint a discouraging picture: of the 279 MTA locals listed that represent K-12 districts, approximately 15% did not have any schools that utilize the MLS membership and resources, and approximately 23% only had one school in multi-school districts with access. What this suggests is that in too many schools there is no certified librarian on staff

to provide access to these resources for students and staff, or that the schools may have a certified librarian who has chosen not to access these resources, which is far less likely.

This smaller data set also revealed further inconsistencies in DESE's staffing data. For example, one district has only one certified librarian listed in the directory, but DESE's data indicates two FTEs. In another, DESE's data lists no librarians on staff in the district, yet it has a school that's a member of the MLS and the librarian does have the appropriate license. The unreliability of DESE's own data collection makes it exceedingly difficult to get an accurate snapshot of school library staffing not only in MTA locals, but also across the entire Commonwealth.

A Preliminary Analysis of Access to Licensed Teacher-Librarians by Selected Student Demographics ([Doherty, 2019](#))

Part of this NBI required that our report should "highlight patterns of inequities along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines." Using DESE's data on school librarian staffing, MTA's CEPP division was able to generate charts and data showing patterns of inequities along socioeconomic lines, but information about racial and ethnic inequities was harder to dig out, especially since DESE collects such sparse and unreliable information about school librarians.

In an effort to begin to look for patterns of inequities along racial and ethnic lines, the author undertook a preliminary comparative study of access to school libraries with licensed librarians between select suburban districts and urban districts. Because the majority of immigrants and students of color in Massachusetts are concentrated in urban areas, the study focused on the 26 midsize urban centers the Massachusetts legislature defines as "Gateway Cities" (MassINC, n.d.) and the city of Boston. These urban centers also tend to have the lowest median household incomes in the state. Licensed school librarian staffing in the Gateway Cities and Boston was compared to licensed school librarian staffing in the wealthiest communities in the state, most of which are located in Boston suburbs and are populated by high percentages of white people.

The suburban list began with the top 26 towns in Massachusetts by median household income levels, a number chosen to match with the number of Gateway Cities ([Reiss & Rocheleau, 2018](#)). Four towns (Bolton, Dunstable, West Newbury, Stow) were eliminated because they were not listed in DESE's district database. Regional high schools for towns on the list (Concord-Carlisle, Dover-Sherborn, and Lincoln-Sudbury) were added, along with one more high income district so that there were 26 high income suburban districts for comparison to the Gateway Cities and Boston. The same census data for incomes in the Gateway Cities and Boston was used ([Reiss & Rocheleau](#)).

DESE's district data for ethnic, racial, and income demographics was included in the comparison. The DESE student demographic categories used were African American, Hispanic, Asian, Multi-race, non-Hispanic, and White, (found under "Enrollment by Race" in the student tab of a district's profile); and Economically Disadvantaged and ELL, (found in the "Selected Populations" link in the student section of a district's profile) ("Profiles Search," n.d.). Once again, DESE's data for school librarian staffing for each district was used ("2017-18 Race/Ethnicity," 2019), but because DESE's data is so unreliable, the author visited most districts' websites and attempted to verify licensed librarian staffing by looking at individual schools and checking on listed staffs' licensure statuses using DESE's *Public Lookup for Educator Licensure* (["Public Lookup," n.d.](#)). If information about libraries and librarians on

district and school websites or the open web wasn't available, the author concluded that they likely did not exist, especially if that is what DESE also reported. Licensed school librarians usually have a public-facing web presence associated with their school libraries.

After the data was collected and organized, it was averaged for a preliminary analysis (Doherty, 2019). The averaged results show extreme inequities in access to licensed teacher-librarians along racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic lines. The [table](#) below summarizes the data (Doherty, 2020):

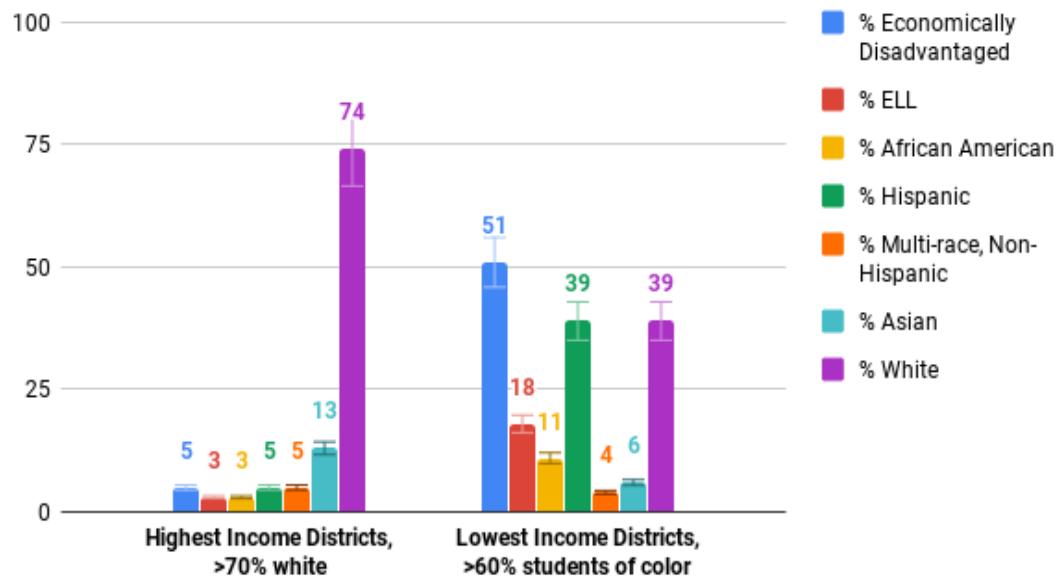
Comparison of Licensed Teacher Librarian Staffing in Different Types of Massachusetts Public School Districts: Highest Suburban Income Bracket, Gateway City, and Large Urban Center												
Type of District	Average Median HH income	% Economically Disadvantaged	% African American	% ELL	% Hispanic	% Asian	% Multi-race, Non - Hispanic	% White	~Number FTE librarians: students	~Number FTE librarians: schools	~Percent Schools that have FTE librarians	
Highest Suburban Income Bracket	\$152,634	5.2	3	2.8	4.7	12.5	5.2	74.4	1:683	.9:1	~90%	
Gateway City	\$54,726	50.5	10.3	17.5	39.2	6.2	3.9	40	1:5602	1:10	~10%	
Large Urban Center (Boston)	\$62,021	56.5	30.9	32.1	42.1	8.9	3.1	14.6	1:5715	1:13	~8%	

Sources of data:

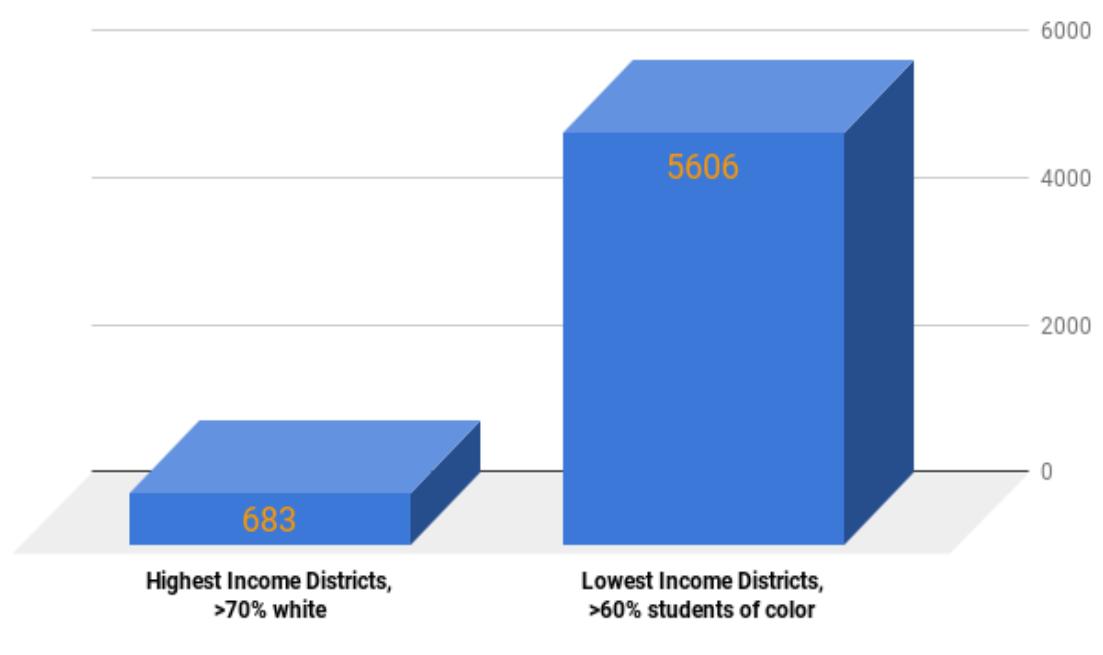
- All income figures are from the [U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey from 2013-17](#).
- Highest Suburban Income Bracket list comprised of the top 27 median incomes listed in the American Community Survey. (Four of the highest income towns not reported in DESE's district data were removed.)
- Gateway City list from [MassINC](#). Gateway Cities are usually Title 1 districts in places like Worcester, Brockton, Fitchburg, Haverhill, Chicopee, and Holyoke.
- District student data from [2018-2019 DESE School and District Profiles](#).
- FTE equivalent librarian data from [2017-2018 DESE Race/Ethnicity and Gender Staffing Report \(DISTRICT\) by Full-time Equivalents for Librarians and Media Center Directors](#). Cross-checked with other sources and corrected where possible.
- Note: All figures are averages for each category in each type of district.

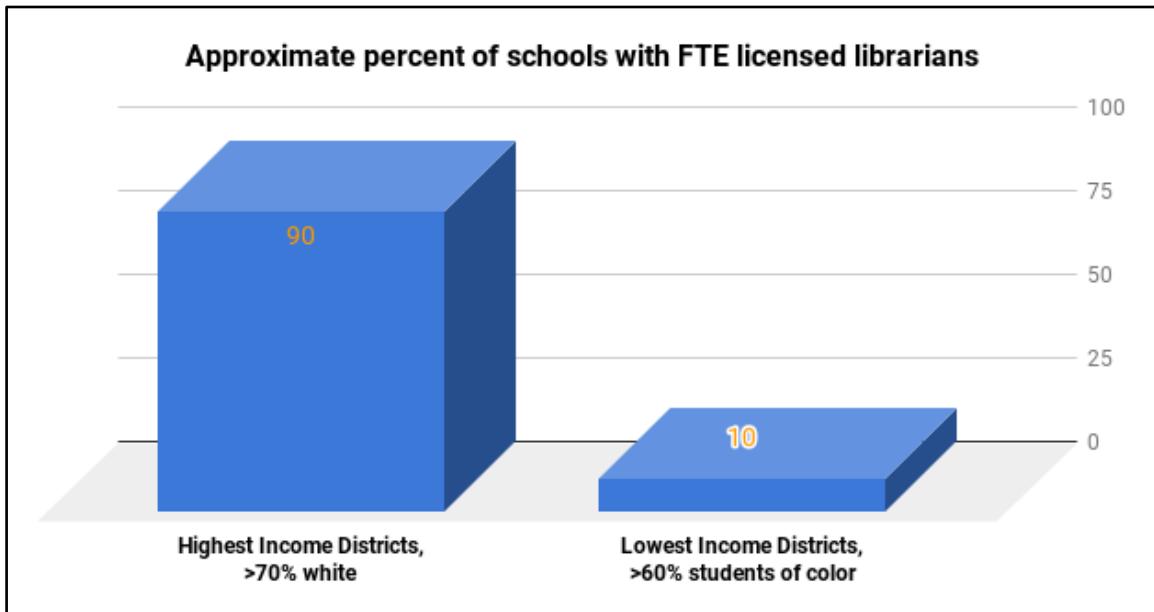
Inequities in student access to licensed librarians in their schools was further analyzed by combining the aggregate data into Highest Income Districts with a majority of white students (greater than 70%) versus Lowest Income Districts with a majority students of color (greater than 60%). The three graphs that follow illustrate this information.

Select Student Demographics of Comparison Districts



Approximate number of students per licensed FTE librarian





CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the available data on school library staffing that the task force considered was incomplete and sometimes incorrect, we were able to note enough commonality in the data found across sources to draw the following conclusions:

1. There has been a sharp decline in licensed school librarian staffing in Massachusetts over the past ten years, mirroring national trends.
2. Access to libraries and licensed librarians is grossly inequitable in Massachusetts public schools, both within districts and between districts.
3. Schools in wealthier districts are significantly more likely to provide access to libraries and licensed librarians than are schools in low-income districts.
4. Schools with a majority of white students are significantly more likely to provide access to libraries and licensed librarians than are schools with a majority of students of color.

To improve and advance library services for all students in Massachusetts public schools, we recommend the following:

1. To get a more accurate picture of the state of school libraries across the state, the MTA should actively support the recommendation of the Special Commission on School Libraries in Massachusetts that DESE perform an official audit of school library resources and staffing in every school district (Special Commission, 2018, p. 113).
2. DESE has been reluctant to conduct this audit despite active lobbying by advocates in the state library and school library communities. If DESE does not conduct its own audit by the end of 2020, we recommend that MTA conduct its own survey of affiliates to attempt to clarify what the situation is in our own locals, and to raise awareness about the issue of inequitable access to school library programs.
3. Finally, we recommend that MTA members take an active role in investigating the situation with school libraries in their workplaces and communities, and that they bargain and advocate for fully resourced, professionally staffed school libraries for *all* students.

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