

# THE STAFFING GAP: TRACKING THE DISAPPEARING LICENSED PUBLIC SCHOOL LIBRARIAN IN MASSACHUSETTS

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## WHAT'S INSIDE

- Licensed Librarian Staffing Trends in Different Types of Districts and Schools
- The Roles of Licensed School Librarians and Library ESPs
- How Students Benefit from Access to Licensed Librarians and Library Programs
- A Call to Action



## AN ISSUE BRIEF BY THE MTA TASK FORCE ON EQUITY IN PREK-12 SCHOOL LIBRARIES

*"My students receive innumerable benefits by having regular access to a licensed school librarian and a well-resourced program, but this should not just be dictated by ZIP code.*

*All students in Massachusetts deserve the same."*

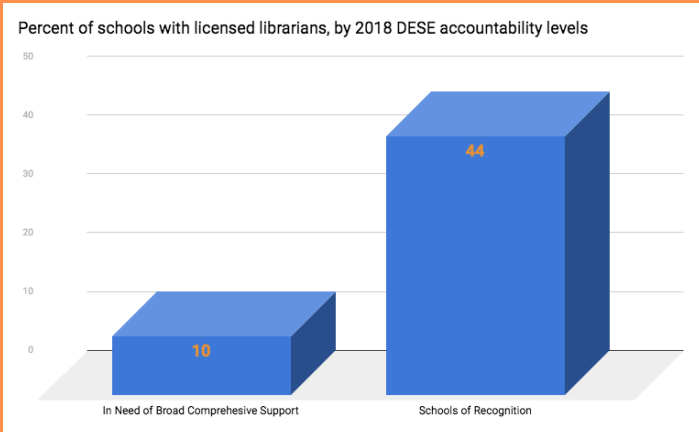
*Maya Bery, licensed teacher librarian, Carlisle Public Schools*

# Data and Trends

## Licensed Librarian Staffing in the Wealthiest Massachusetts Districts vs. Gateway Cities and Boston: Preliminary Analysis

A task force analysis comparing full-time equivalent (FTE) licensed library staffing in 26 districts in the highest-median-income cities and towns in Massachusetts to 26 Gateway Cities and Boston found severe inequities in access to licensed librarians. According to DESE's 2017-18 statewide data on school librarian staffing, most of the schools in the highest-income districts with a majority of white students have licensed librarians, while the lowest-income districts with a majority of students of color do not. In addition, most of the highest-income districts with a majority of white students also employ at least some education support professionals (ESPs), freeing up more instructional, collaborative and administrative time for librarians.

Schools rated by the commissioner as being "in broad need of comprehensive support" would benefit from having licensed librarians. "Schools of Recognition" report having more than four times as many!



Spotlight on the problem

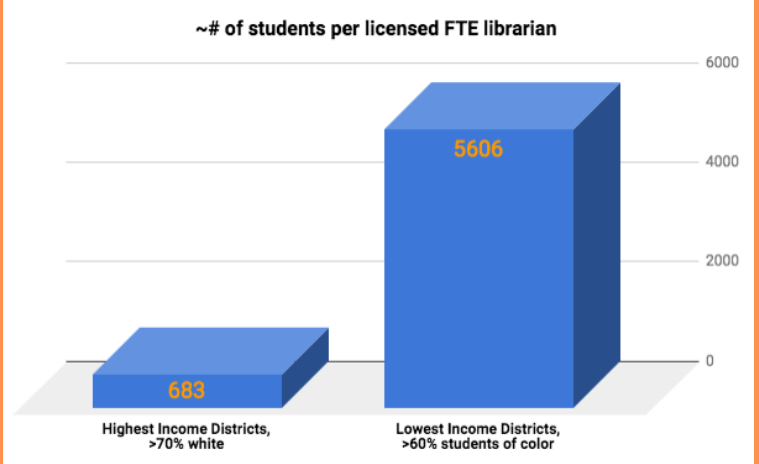
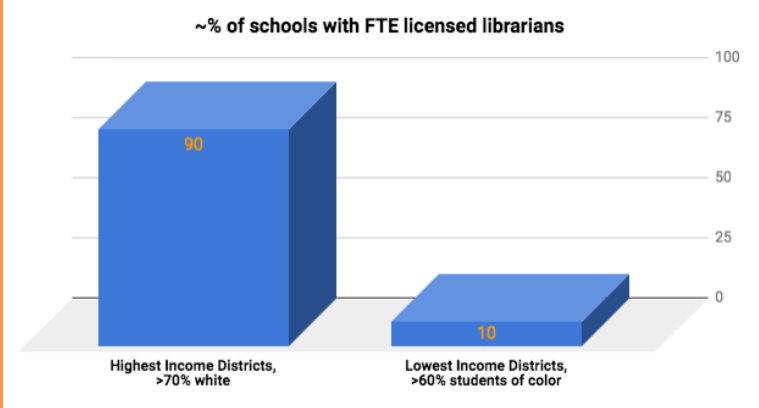
**Dispatch from a Gateway City district:** "There is only one professional librarian in the entire district. The elementary schools that have active libraries are staffed by ESPs or parents. The only certified librarian is at the 1,230-student high school. There is no library budget and no assistant. The librarian acts as the Chromebook help desk, handling 2,000+ Chromebook issues a year.... There is constant noise. The constant noise prevents classes from coming to the library for information literacy instruction. ”

### DESE Data Highlights

DESE is the only statewide source of data for school library staffing. Although we confirmed a number of errors, there was enough verified data to note some trends.

*Most recent year for available data was 2017-18*

- Just 33 percent of 1,847 schools reported employing licensed librarians, and only 21 percent reported at least one FTE.
- Most privately managed charter schools do not report having **any** librarians on staff.
- Only 16 percent of schools with a majority of economically disadvantaged students reported having librarians.
- Only 11 percent of districts reported having more than two librarians, and these districts tend to be wealthier and whiter.



# LICENSED SCHOOL LIBRARIANS & ESPs: WORKING TOGETHER FOR STUDENTS

## Licensed School Librarians Teach & Administer Library Programs! We ...

- Are expert teachers of information literacy and project-based learning
- Plan and teach classes on a fixed or flexible schedule
- Play an integral role in developing a love of reading in students
- Curate and manage a wide collection of digital and print resources to support the curriculum and appeal to students' interests
- Collaborate with faculty and provide professional development
- Write and administer grants
- Are licensed teachers with library science master's degrees

“With paraeducator support, the library is ... open to students throughout the academic day, even when I am teaching or doing a classroom visit.”

*Ella Stocker, licensed librarian, Amherst-Pelham Regional High School*

## ESPs Support Librarians and Help Students! We ...

- Circulate & shelve books
- Process, repair, inventory and display materials
- Perform clerical tasks
- Train volunteers
- Help individual students
- Are not licensed teachers
- Are frequently exploited. We fill in gaps created by eliminating licensed librarians without having the qualifications or being paid for the work

## Study after Study ...

More than 34 state-level studies have found that when their schools have strong library programs staffed by licensed school librarians, students score higher on reading and achievement tests. This trend holds true regardless of other factors, such as class size, per-pupil funding, and student socioeconomic conditions. A study in Pennsylvania reported that significantly fewer students scored “below basic” in reading when they had access to a strong library program. Another study found that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scores for low-income, black and Latino students improved in states that added licensed librarians, while ELL reading scores dropped in states that lost them (Lance and Kachel, 2018).

## ... is ignored

“They don't have basic things like librarians. I was the worst student [in Middletown, N.J.], but the school librarian was great. She turned me on to Allen Ginsberg and things like that.”

*Steven Van Zandt at the UTLA strike (Browne)*

## Spotlight on collaboration



At Westborough High School, library teacher Anita Cellucci (left) and counselor Ceil Partelano (right) collaborated on a bibliotherapy program to help students learn coping skills. Bibliotherapy uses literature to help students reflect upon their own lives.



# WE INSPIRE STUDENTS



I want to intern as a librarian because of the difference I can make in kids' lives. ... I love that I am able to help kids find books that engage them and encourage them to read more in the future."

*Marisa Proia, senior in Newton North High School's Capstone Program*

## CALL TO ACTION!

### Investigate

- Conduct an audit of your own school and local. Find out who is teaching and working in your school and district libraries.
- Are the "librarians" licensed, or are they ESPs who are being exploited to save money in an environment of austerity?
- Find out what is happening in your own children's schools: What are children learning when they have library day? Do secondary students use the library and databases for research?

### Advocate

- For funding for library positions and resources.
- For state regulations requiring that ALL students have equitable access to school libraries with licensed librarians.

### Bargain

- For licensed library positions and library ESPs for ALL students.
- For the preservation of professional positions, which provide a pathway to advancement for education workers to follow.
- For job descriptions and job titles that make work responsibilities clear so that people will not be exploited.

### Learn

- For more information and talking points, visit the MTA School Library Task Force toolkit at [massteacher.org](http://massteacher.org).



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