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School Libraries Key to Better Graduation Rates and Student Achievement

New study says look at number of certified teacher-librarians for advantage

OLYMPIA, Wash., April 15, 2015—Research made public today pinpointed a little-known but big reason why some Washington state schools have higher graduation rates and test scores than others.

“Students who attend schools with certified teacher-librarians (CTLs) and quality library facilities perform better on standardized tests and are more likely to graduate,” says Craig Seasholes, a Washington State Certificated Librarian and lead committee member overseeing the study commissioned by the Washington Library Media Association. The report is titled *Certified Teacher-Librarians, Library Quality and Student Achievement in Washington State Public Schools*, by Dr Elizabeth Coker, PhD, MSED, was made public this week.

The findings suggest several possible explanations for the correlation between CTLs and student performance, including the unique contributions of teacher-librarians to the general curriculum. For example, “CTL-staffed libraries are more likely to use up-to-date library curriculum developed in collaboration with general education teachers.” Furthermore, CTLs “are far more likely to be directly involved in teaching curriculum-designed around Common Core standards.”

In other words, “it is the quality of the library facility and related instructional services rather than its presence or absence that makes a difference for student achievement,” according to Coker, who drew her analysis from the 1,486 out of 2,428 K-12 schools in Washington state who responded to a survey administered by the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) in the Spring of 2014.

No surprise that wealthier school districts would do better than poorer ones in graduation rates. Their resources allow for some CTLs, but one finding in the report vital to everyone responsible for shaping an education budget is that “... while high-poverty schools do have worse graduation rates than low-poverty schools, this gap is not inevitable; and one key factor distinguishing high-performing high-poverty schools from low-performing high-poverty schools is a quality library program.”

“What this report demonstrates,” said Sharyn Merrigan, president of the Washington Library Association, “is that for a small investment in stronger library programs staffed by certified teacher-librarians, the state could reap a windfall in having students primed for college or careers and ready to contribute to society. Yet the state has cut approximately 200 CTLs from schools for the past 15 years, and many school districts have eliminated librarians and library programs entirely.”

A 689-word guest editorial with more information is available here. Media are welcome to use it as free content for their publications and websites.

<http://www.wla.org/wlma-advocacy>

Washington’s citizens rely upon libraries to further their education, enhance their skills in the work place, fully function in today’s global society, and enrich and enjoy their daily lives. The Washington Library Association, with a membership of 742 individuals and 47 institutions, provides the leadership needed to develop, improve, and promote library services to all Washington residents. Learn more at <http://www.wla.org/wlma-home>