

How can your school's library program boost student achievement?

School libraries have changed a lot over the last 15 years. They are still the number one place students have access to pleasure reading materials, but they also hold a big opportunity to shift school culture toward student achievement. [Twenty-five national studies](#) have proved that having library with an updated collection, staffed by a certified teacher librarian who is both an educational technology evangelist and a bibliophile can increase student achievement in a school. In 2015, a [study was conducted in Washington State](#) that showed a 35.6% increase for the five-year graduation rate in high poverty schools, that staffed a certified teacher-librarian. A study out of Colorado saw an 16% increase in advanced reading scores for schools that kept their teacher-librarians, then in schools that lost librarians during the recession. South Carolina found that schools who had a full-time certified librarian and a part-time clerical assistant, had students that scored better on their state writing exam than schools that did not have a librarian with clerical help.

It's not just simply staffing a certified librarian, it's what they are doing in your school that will make academic impact. There are [national school library standards](#) teacher-librarians must teach in all grade levels. However, [these standards](#) teach students processes for learning, not content. Teacher-librarians teach media literacy, inquiry process, and digital citizenship, but to truly effect student achievement their standards must be co-taught with content teachers. The instructional partnership of content teachers and teacher-librarians is what leads to deeper learning of both process and content.

If students visit the library once a week for a thirty minute "library time" and checkout is included in that time, librarians are only able to teach each class for 18 hours a year. These lessons are often very low level and cannot include the level of rigor reflected in the new national library standards. Therefore, a flexible schedule, not a coverage model is needed to increase time for students to dig into research. Students should be able to come every day for a week in different lengths of time with their teachers as needed to finish a project, using the library in an authentic manner. This helps teachers too! Research is in all our Common Core standards, but is usually taught by the teacher, not following any inquiry process and giving students a few websites and books to use as sources. If students don't learn how to vet their sources, curate the best sources, or use the information they find ethically it can have long lasting consequences into their adult lives. In these rigorous lessons, they also learn how to use informational text authentically and for a purpose. The more continuous time students are using informational text the more skillful they will become at skimming, using text features, and finding evidence to back up their claims.

According to OSPI, Washington State has a 16% chronic absentee rate. It is even higher for students of color. If students need to be in school to achieve. Many of chronic absent students don't feel like school is a place they can be themselves. They don't feel successful or a sense of belonging in school. The school library can be that third space for students. A place to create shared experiences that merges the student's home life and school life. The school library creates a conduit for student's everyday life experiences and an echo chamber of their social, emotional, and physical needs. Students who find a place in the library are given the opportunity to embed themselves in a supportive community can become leaders schoolwide. Even Bill Gates attributes some of his success to his [teacher-librarian](#) who helped him feel a sense of belonging. Teacher-librarians ask about students' interests and gives students one-on-one attention they often have trouble finding in our large public school classrooms. The library in many cases is the only place schoolwide that is directly a student space that reflects the student population and their interests. Libraries are a sanctuary and a life line that can help get students to want to come to school.

The most important way schools can help teacher-librarians make an impact on achievement is to let them do their jobs. So often administrators don't understand what teacher-librarians do, so they invent jobs for them or overload their schedules. Teacher-librarians teach, manage a space and materials, budget, and design engaging programs for students. More and more are also running makerspaces, coding clubs, and training students and staff on the latest technology. Respect their role in the educational ecosystem and your students (and their achievement scores) will thank you!

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