

2005

What Do Board Members Think School Librarians Do? Perceptions of School Librarians by Iowa School Board Members

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What do Board Members Think School Librarians Do?
Perceptions of School Librarians by Iowa School Board Members

This Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Division of School Library Media Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Northern Iowa

by
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January 2005

This Research Paper by: Lori Minnard

Titled: What Do Board Members Think School Librarians Do?

has been approved as meeting the research requirements for the degree
Master of Arts

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Abstract

School board members may make personnel and other budgeting decisions without being aware of the roles and contributions of school library media programs to student learning. This study demonstrated the levels of knowledge school board members in a small K-12 school in Northwest Iowa have about their school library programs. The board members in this study are the five members of a small school in Northwest Iowa with a student population of approximately 600.

The survey was given in two parts. For the first part of the survey, the participants were instructed to write down the top five professional tasks they believe are the responsibility of the school librarian. The second part of the survey consisted of a list of tasks. The participants were instructed to check yes if they believed the task was the responsibility of the school librarian and check no, if they believed the task was not the responsibility of the school librarian. The responses to the first part of the survey were coded according to the level of the task. The two levels used were professional and clerical. The tasks listed in the second portion of the survey were coded according to the levels of the tasks and function, of four professional roles of a school librarian. Some of the tasks listed in the second portion of the represented clerical or technical roles rather than librarian's roles and served as control devices.

Of the five delivered surveys, four were returned. The first portion of all four surveys were valid and used in this study. The second portion of one of the returned surveys was invalid and not used in this study because all of the answers were simply marked yes.

All five hypotheses predicting sixty percent of the board members in this study would give knowledgeable responses to the survey data were rejected. While some of the members did recognize some of the professional duties for which school librarians are responsible, none of the members recognized all of the duties. Only one board member was able to recognize all of the duties in one of the categories on the second portion of the survey.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

States govern their schools through state boards of education, administered through state departments of education (Guthrie, 2003). Individual school districts in Iowa are governed by school boards (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2002).

Responsibilities of School Boards

Although they often overlap, three main responsibilities of school boards can be distinguished. The first responsibility is policymaking. Policies must be created to ensure the sound operation of the school district. Typically state law requires boards to approve the district's budget; develop long and short-term goals; establish educational objectives, performance indicators, and pupil assessment systems; and approve curricular frameworks and standards for student achievement. Legal mandates based on state and federal legislation, judicial decisions, and negotiated union contracts are just a few things that can complicate the board's policymaking authority. Secondly, the board acts as the administrative agency. Public accountability requires boards to provide oversight, adopt standards, and assess programs toward the accomplishment of district objectives. Lastly, the board has a leadership responsibility. The board adopts a unifying vision and mission. The board communicates with the community and advocates for the educational needs of all children (Guthrie, 2003).

Factors that effect how boards make decisions include the issues being addressed, the parties involved, operational procedures, time constraints, and personal values of the decision-makers. Decision-making is a highly political process (Guthrie, 2003). The relationship of the board to professional educators, especially the superintendent can be

crucial. “Lay school board members are tending to turn significant control over to educational professionals and school boards have often become little more than ‘rubber stamps’ that legitimize the power of the superintendent” (Hausen, 1994, p. 34-93).

Iowa School Boards

Iowa has a department of education (DOE) that, among numerous other things, establishes policies to interpret legislative action for Iowa schools (Iowa Department of Education, 2004). The Iowa DOE does not, however, set statewide standards for education to which school districts must adhere to (DiegmueLLer, 2004). Standards are official, written guidelines that define what a state expects students to be able to do by a specific grade level (Collins, 1997, p. 72). In Iowa, educational standards are left up to individual school districts, which gives the school board governing these districts the power to set the standards.

“About 2,100 men and women serve on local public school boards in Iowa, guiding the education of 494,000 young people while overseeing a budget of more than \$3.4 billion” (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2003). Iowa school boards, therefore, have a tremendous amount of authority. According to the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB), school boards have the legal authority to develop a shared educational vision for the community, employ a superintendent, teachers, principals, and other licensed professionals, provide transportation services, and adopt board policy which establishes the rules governing the operations of the school district. The board also has four basic roles in student achievement: holding high expectations, supporting successful teaching and learning, being accountable for student success, and linking the school with

the community (Iowa Association of School Boards, 2002). Often school board members must make budgetary decisions with a budget that is less than the previous year's.

Few board members have a professional background in education and they are likely to lack expertise in many areas their boards must address. Individuals concerned with school governance have been advocating enhanced board member training for a long time, for this reason. If board members do receive training it is most commonly in the areas of board member roles and responsibilities, board operations, or formal legal concerns. The most commonly addressed topics are: board and superintendent relations, leadership skills, legal issues in education, and board accountability (Hess, 2002).

Accountability for Achievement

With the implementation of the federal *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act* of 2001 American schools are facing an unprecedented task. Schools are being required to educate all students at a high level. This is a noble goal, and one that most educators strive for. However, the exacting requirements, timing, and lack of funding make it an extremely difficult, if not impossible law to uphold. When our country was founded, public schools were expected to teach democratic values, and basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. Since then, the expectations have expanded widely. Today our schools also must serve students with a wide range of skills, needs, language and physical challenges as well as those with learning disabilities. Yet schools are expected to improve achievement to higher than ever levels, leaving no child left behind and must prove it all with one single high-stakes assessment measure at the end of the academic year (Ferrandino, 2004).

Iowa was striving to meet high student achievement goals before NCLB was established through comprehensive school improvement plans (CSIP). These plans are intended to promote school, parental, and community involvement to increase the learning, achievement, and performance of all students (Accountability of Student Achievement, 1999). This all adds up to a great deal of work on the part of teachers, administrators, curriculum coordinators, and school boards.

School Libraries

School librarians fill many roles in the school that can be attributed to increase student achievement. The school librarian has four main roles including teacher, instructional consultant, information specialist, and program administrator (American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998, p. 1-5). As a teacher, the librarian collaborates with teachers and guides students through accessing, evaluating, and using information from multiple sources to enable the students to learn, think, and create and apply new knowledge (American Association of School Librarians and Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998). As an instructional consultant, the librarian collaborates with the entire school community and takes a leading role in developing policies, practices and curricula that guide students to develop information literacy and communication abilities (p. 4-5). As information specialist, the librarian is an expert in acquiring and evaluating information in all formats. As a master of electronic resources, the librarian maintains a constant focus on the nature, quality, and ethical use of information (p. 5). Lastly, as an administrator of the library program, the librarian works collaboratively with members of the learning community to define the policies and

procedures of the library. As a manager of staff, budgets, equipment, and facilities, the librarian plans, executes, and evaluates the library program continuously (p. 5).

Today's board members report that student achievement is a pressing concern (Hess, 2002). Recent findings suggest that there is a direct correlation between quality school library programs and student achievement (Rodney, Lance, & Hamilton-Pennel, 2002). It is through the use of the library that students learn information literacy – the ability to find and use information. The library is a space filled with books, computers, and a wide variety of information resources. The library program provides collaborative teaching and learning along with information access skills. The school librarian uses information literacy standards to create a program that will improve the learning of all students and reach out to a broader learning community to include teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. For those closely connected to the school library the importance of the library program may seem obvious, but others question the importance of the library program and the impact it may have on student learning.

For many years, the declining condition of library media programs in Iowa public schools has been a cause for concern to the Iowa Area Education Agency (AEA) media directors. As part of a campaign to reverse the alarming trend, leaders of these organizations resolved to document the impact of library media programs in Iowa schools and to share this information with school decision-makers...(Rodney, Lance, & Hamilton-Pennel, 2002, p. 1.)

This concern led to a research study called *Make the Connections: Quality Library Media Programs Impact Academic Achievement in Iowa* (Rodney, 2002). This project has

become commonly known as the *Iowa Study* and produced some not-so-surprising findings. The study shows a direct correlation between a strong school library program and student achievement. Iowa reading test scores rise in schools that have strong library programs. To be more specific, reading test scores rise with an increase in weekly library media specialist staff hours per 100 students, total weekly library media staff hours per 100 students, print volumes per student, and periodical subscriptions per 100 students (Rodney, 2002, p. vii). According to the study some key elements that make a school library media program strong are adequate staffing, adequate collections, and staff who are actively involved leaders in their school's teaching and learning, library staff who have collaborative relationships with classroom teachers, and networked information technology (p. ix). The data that show the importance of school library programs are available, but they need to be understood by the decision-makers to enable them to make the most informed decisions.

An additional issue that sometimes confuses Board Members and others is that the roles of the school librarian are not easily observable. School librarians must hold not only teaching licenses but an additional endorsement based on library course work. What many people see when looking at libraries, however, are the routine operations of check out, shelving and troubleshooting computer problems. These routine clerical technical tasks should be performed by support staff, so that librarians can do the teaching, planning, collection-building and collaborating that they have been prepared to do (Woolls, 2004, p. 83).

Hinton Community School District

Hinton, Iowa is located 11 miles north of Sioux City, Iowa. The town is only .6 of a square mile, with a population of 808. Ninety-seven percent of the population is white, non-Hispanic with an average age of 37.9 years. The average cost of a new, single-family home in 2002 was \$175,000. The largest employer in the town is the school (City-Data.com, 2004). There are approximately 600 students in grades Pre-K through 12th. Of those students approximately 43% come from rural farm areas inside of the Hinton School District, but outside of the city boarders. The school employs approximately 42 certified staff members, 28 non-certified staff members, and 3 administrators (Hinton Community School Homepage, 1999). Board members are required to be a citizen of the school district, eligible elector of the district, and be free from a financial conflict of interest with the position. The board has five members who are elected for three-year terms. The current board consists of one female president and four male members (Hinton School Board Policy Book).

Description of Problem

School board members may make personnel and other budgeting decisions without being aware of the roles and contributions of school library media programs to student learning. School board members need to be informed regarding the Iowa Study and similar information.

Research Questions

1. Are school board members properly informed about the library programs in their schools?
2. How do school board members find out about the library programs in their schools?
3. Do school board members know what school librarians do?

Purpose Statement

This study will show what levels of knowledge school board members in a small K-12 school in Northwest Iowa have about their school library programs.

Hypotheses

1. Sixty percent of the board members in this study will be able to write five professional tasks school librarians do.
2. Sixty percent of the board members in this study will be able to recognize all of the tasks associated with the information specialist function of a school librarian.
3. Sixty percent of the board members in this study will be able to recognize all of the tasks associated with the teaching function of a school librarian.
4. Sixty percent of the board members in this study will be able to recognize all of the tasks associated with the collaborative function of a school librarian.
5. Sixty percent of the board members in this study will be able to recognize all of the tasks associated with the administrative function of a school librarian.

Definitions

Library- A collection of materials organized to provide physical, bibliographic, and intellectual access to a target group, with a staff that is trained to provide services and programs related to the information needs of the target group (Young, 1983, p. 130).

Library collection- The total accumulation of materials provided by a library for its target group. Synonymous with library holdings and library resources (p. 131).

Librarian- One who has care of a library and its contents; the work includes selection of stock, its arrangement and exploitation in the widest sense, and the provision of a range of services, in the best interest of all groups of users. Coordination of activities, setting of

priorities, evaluation and other managerial tasks are an essential part of the work.

Involvement in the community served, whether public, academic, private or any other context is also of great importance (Prytherch, 1995, p. 377).

Assumptions

It was assumed that the school board members in the district would respond honestly and carefully to the survey so the study could be carried out.

Limitations

This study was be limited by the fact that only one school board in Iowa will be studied, therefore the results may not be generalized to other areas.

Significance

Decision makers in schools are flooded with an overwhelming number of issues that often must be dealt with in a timely fashion. It would be nearly impossible for every school board member to gather all of the pertinent information surrounding a decision, and review, and digest it all before each decision needs to be made. School board members are often professionals with families who volunteer a great deal of time as it is to the school. It is unlikely that school board members will seek out information about school library programs unless there is a particular problem that arises. If librarians would like to have board members who appreciate their library programs, then librarians must have a better understanding of how board members perceive the role of the school library media program.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

School board members make personnel and other building decisions constantly throughout every school year. These decisions are crucial to the success of the school and students. Before decisions are made school board members need to have the proper information to assist them in the decision-making process. Where do board members obtain the information from which their decisions are based? How do board members make decisions with the information that they do have? These are the questions that librarians who are concerned about the decision-making process of school boards need to be asking themselves.

What Librarians Do

Libraries are important, but just as important are the professional librarians who are in charge of them. A look at the characteristics of contemporary librarians and what they do on the job has been examined in several studies. Rubin and Buttlar (1992) looked at the organizational commitment of high school librarians in Ohio (p. 307). The study set out to determine the level of organizational commitment of the librarians and to identify the factors likely to produce and impede its development (p. 307).

A self-administered questionnaire was sent to librarians identified in the Ohio Educational Directory. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. Part one consisted of the organizational commitment questions. The librarians were asked to indicate their agreement with the statements using a seven-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The second part of the questionnaire was made up of questions specifically about being a librarian. This section attempted to find out how the librarians felt about

their job. The third part of the questionnaire collected personal and job-related data such as age, salary, level of education, and size of school. A total of 371 usable questionnaires were returned which represented an 80% return rate (p. 309-310).

The study found that a high percentage of Ohio high school librarians have a high level of job commitment. This is consistent with other findings in the library literature that shows that the turnover of library professionals is quite low. Employees who think their jobs are in jeopardy usually have a lower job commitment. The librarians in this study all felt that their jobs were secure; therefore they felt more committed. When employees build and maintain social ties with other employees, job commitment tends to go up. Commitment also rises when employees feel satisfied with their jobs. This study should be reassuring to librarians and administrators because overall it appears that high school library media specialist receive the treatment and job challenges that fosters commitment on the job (p. 321-3).

This study did not have suggestions for further research, but did suggest that administrators may need to develop more mechanisms for letting their librarian know that they are performing well (p. 323). This could be an area that deserves more study.

Williams (2001) states in an article that he knew what he did all day as a librarian, but found that most other teachers and administrators in the school did not (Williams, 1983, p. 34). This became a problem that Williams set out to rectify. Williams asked a teacher, who had made comments about William's easy job in the past, to come and spend a day job shadowing. After a day in the library this teacher was William's new best advocate in the school. It worked so well that Williams decided to ask the administrator who would be conducting his next evaluation to job shadow for just a few

periods (p. 34-35).

The administrator was allowed to pick the day for the shadowing to take place so he would know that Williams was not arranging the day to be more busy than normal. Williams did, however, make sure that the administrator would get to see a variety of tasks performed if only for a minute or two. Some of the things the administrator saw were collaboration with teachers, cataloging, student aides checking books in and out and assisting other students with location of materials, book processing, and the professional journals that Williams subscribed to. Williams attempted to keep a commentary going with the administrator during the shadowing so as to keep him an active participant and to ensure that he understood what was being done (p. 35).

Does all of this work? According to Williams, yes. The administrator usually leaves exhausted, but with a clearer idea of what a librarian does in a typical day. Over the years Williams has done this experiment three times, each with a different evaluator. Each administrator admitted that they did not fully understand what a librarian did all day, and one even told Williams that a new job description needed to be written (p. 35).

Having an accurate job description is important for librarians. Riedling set out in 2001 to ascertain whether school librarians job descriptions reflect the beliefs stated in *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (Riedling, 2001, p. 28). Riedling sent out a request via a listserv for school librarian's job descriptions from around the United States. Thirty-one were returned over a three-week time period. All responsibilities of every description were then compiled into a list of about 900 duties. Five divisions emerged from the list: administrative, collection development and maintenance, curriculum development, instructional consultant, and professional. Using

these divisions and the rest of the data, a model school librarian job description was formed (p. 28-29).

Overall, the model job description created as a result of this study correlates with the majority of beliefs outlined in Information Power. Riedling notes several areas that should receive more emphasis in the 21st century school library program. School librarians must be leaders and assume leadership roles in staff development. School librarians must maintain current knowledge of the research and best practices in all aspects of the field. School librarians must acquire and circulate resources that meet the needs of students with special needs. School librarians should be enthusiastic about their job and teaching and learning and model attitudes and skills of independent lifelong learners (p. 31).

What School Library Programs Do

Kane found (2004) that school staff members have misconceptions about how school librarians spend their time (p. 34). School staff members think librarians spend most of their day checking books in and out and shelving books (p. 34). Wible quotes an Iowa school superintendent as saying, “What you have to do is cut those people who have the least impact on students; you cut positions like custodians, bus drivers, librarians” (2002, p. 1). Wibles found (2002) that principals often evaluate librarians the same way they evaluate teachers, leaving out important tasks such as teaching to small groups, collaborative efforts, and information and administrative tasks (p. 1). These studies suggest that many teachers and administrators are unaware of what librarians do and how librarians impact student achievement. If board members are getting the wealth of their

information from these uninformed teachers and administrators how can they possibly make well-informed decisions that directly affect the libraries in their schools?

As previously stated, school boards are responsible for making important decisions concerning all programs in the school. Decisions concerning the library program are just one area that can be greatly affected by the decisions board members make, and yet libraries impact all students. This section of the literature review will examine data that will demonstrate the importance of school library programs.

Impact studies.

Lance, Welborn, and Hamilton-Pennell conducted a study that examined the importance of school libraries in 1993 (p. 1). The study investigates the impact of school libraries on academic achievement in Colorado schools. The study was prompted by the idea that school library advocates needed evidence of the links between quality libraries and academic achievement.

This study was designed to rely on the availability of existing data. To be included in the study a school had to meet certain criteria, including: 1980 U.S. Census data for its school district, 1988-89 building-level school statistics, 1988-89 data for its library, and selected 1989 scores from the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)* or the *Test of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP)*(p. 11). This study relied entirely upon norm-referenced test scores to measure academic achievement and correlated existing data about school libraries and their school communities as predictors of such achievement (p. 17).

This study asked three questions. One, is there, in fact, a relationship between expenditures on the library and test performance, particularly when social and economic

differences between communities and schools are controlled. Two, assuming that there is a relationship between library expenditures and test performance, which intervening characteristics of library programs help to explain this relationship? Three, does the performance of an instructional role by librarians help to predict test performances? Findings were that A, students at schools with better-funded libraries tend to do better on tests, whether their school and communities are rich or poor and whether adults in the community are well or poorly educated, B, the size of the library's staff and the size and variety of the collection are important characteristics, and C, students whose librarian played a role in identifying materials to be used with teacher-planned instructional units or by collaboration with teachers in planning instructional units tend to achieve higher average test scores (p. 93). Funding is important also, but two of its specific purposes are to ensure adequate staffing in relation to school enrollment and a collection, which offers a large number of materials in a variety of formats.

The representativeness of this study, of all Colorado public schools, and of the U.S. public schools is questionable. Further studies similar in nature were recommended. If schools in other states were to do a similar study and require schools to use the same non-referenced tests and the same method for collecting the library data the findings would be more authoritative (p. 94).

In 2000, Lance Welborn, and Hamilton-Pennell repeated this study in Colorado.

Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) reading scores increase with increases in the following characteristics of library media (LM) programs: LM program development, information technology, teacher/library media specialist (LMS) collaboration, and individual visits

to the library media center (LMC). In addition, as participation increases in leadership roles, so does collaboration between teachers and LMSs. The relationship between these factors and test scores is not explained away by other school or community conditions (Library Research Services, 2000).

In a similar study completed by Krashen in 1995, the relationship between the availability of books from public and school libraries impact on reading test scores was researched (p. 235). The study focused on the relationship between reading ability and library quality in the United States. In addition, the impact of software in school libraries on reading was also considered (p. 235).

Fourth-grade scores on the 1992 NAEP Reading Comprehensive test were used to determine reading levels. The scores from 41 states were used. Data about elementary school libraries such as number of books per student per state, the amount of software, and a measure of library service was taken from a previous study.

Indicators of school library quality and public library use were significant predictors of reading test scores. This is consistent with earlier studies that show free reading is a consistent predictor of reading ability and that libraries are a major source of reading materials for children.

Expenditures for education did not affect reading comprehension test scores.

Lance et al. also found that total school expenditures were not related to reading scores, but did report that money invested in the school library media center has an effect on collection size, which in turn affects reading test scores. This suggests that for money to affect reading scores, it needs to be invested in the library (Krashen, 1995, p. 236).

The results of this study were very consistent with research on reading and the role of libraries and provide support for the theory that the act of reading itself is largely responsible for the development of literacy (p. 236).

The fact that only one measure for each of the variables in this study was used calls for replication of the study. Further research in the area of libraries impact on reading test scores was recommended (p. 237).

Iowa impact study.

Research that verified much of that done in Colorado was a similar study conducted in Iowa by Rodney, Lance, and Hamilton-Pennell in 2002. The problem that initiated this study is that for many years, the declining condition of library programs in Iowa public schools have been a cause for concern to the Iowa Area Education Agency media directors (Rodney, Lance, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2002, p. 1).

Grades four, eight, and eleven are tested grades in Iowa and there are several hundred schools serving these populations. A survey of library programs was used for the study and focused on items such as library hours, library staff and their activities, technology, library usage, library resources and collection, and finances (p. 29). Of the 717 schools serving forth grade, 169 participated in the study. Of the 410 schools serving eighth grade, 162 participated in the study. Of the 370 schools serving the eleventh grade 175 participated in the study. The study also relied upon existing data such as demographic data; school's enrollment information, expenditure data, *the Iowa Test of Basic Skills* test results, and the *Iowa Tests of Educational Development* test results (p. 32-33).

Iowa reading test scores rise with the development of the library program. The relationship between the library program and test scores is not explained away by other school or community conditions at the elementary school level or by other school conditions at the middle school level. At both middle and high school levels, there was insufficient variation in library staffing to make further claims. Iowa reading test scores tend to rise with increase in librarian staff hour per 100 students, total staff hours per 100 students, print volumes per student, and periodical subscriptions per 100 students. Librarians exert a complex web of effects on the library program. A strong library program is one that is adequately staffed, stocked and funded, whose staff are actively involved leaders in their school's teaching and learning enterprise, whose staff have collegial, collaborative relationships with classroom teachers, and that embraces networked information technology (Rodney, Lance, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2002, p. 73). Similar studies to the Colorado and Iowa studies have been done in twelve other states, all suggesting that libraries impact student achievement (Library Research Services, 2004).

The Iowa study specifically recommends to Iowa school decision-makers several plans for action. Libraries should have funding for adequate professional and support staff, information resources and technology. Librarians must be leaders in their schools and take roles in developing standards and curriculum. Principals can be supportive of the library program by maintaining high expectations of the library program and encouraging teachers to accept librarians as colleagues. The physical library must not restrict library resources; information technology that is linked to the library needs to be available throughout the school. Librarians must ensure that the school community has access to

high-quality licensed databases and provide the necessary training to ensure the school community knows how to use them (p. 91).

How School Board Members Make Decisions

School board members make critical decisions in many different areas that affect the schools they govern. Brown, Newman, and Rivers (1985) studied contextual factors as influences on school board evaluation information needs for decision-making (p. 437). The problem on which this study focused was that decision-making by school boards is often influenced by factors other than data (p. 437).

The population studied consisted of 108 school districts from 20 states. The states were chosen using a systematic random sampling procedure so that the six regional accreditation areas would be included. Seventy-eight school boards participated, and 237 board members from 56 districts completed and returned their surveys. Vignettes, or brief literary sketches, were prepared as the survey tool. Each vignette described a school program in an elementary or secondary setting that might be presented to a school board in a real situation. Some of the vignettes described high levels of conflict and some described low levels of conflict. Changing the budgetary implications varied the importance of the decisions to be made by the board and length of time before the decision would need to be looked at again. Each board member was given two vignettes, one social and one curricular. After reading the vignettes, the members responded to seven multiple-choice questions and three open-ended questions (p. 438-439).

Many of the findings were statistically significant, but of small magnitude. Board member's needs and decision-making processes for this study differed depending on several contextual variables such as the importance of the decision, the amount of

potential personal conflict, and the content of the program being considered. The vignettes that were about curricular programs led the board to seek more information and consider obtaining information from a consultant more so than did the vignettes about social programs. The decisions that were more likely to result in personal conflict also led the board to want more information, time, and consultant advice than the decisions that were unlikely to result in personal conflict. The opinion of others, especially of the superintendent appeared to be a very important source of information for boards. In fact, community member's opinions, and the superintendent's input were requested more than consultant's advice (p. 442-443).

Newman and Brown examined patterns of school board decision-making in another study in 1992. The study set out to identify patterns among a national sample of school boards, and the difference in decision-making that occur among these patterns. A hypothesis by Blanchard (1975) that school boards can be characterized into three groups was used for this study (Newman & Brown, 1992, p. 2).

According to Blanchard, the first group, identified as "bipolar," perceived itself as frequently being in conflict on decisions and voting in consistent but opposing blocs on most issues. "Unipolar" boards were those who perceived limited conflict and no specific voting pattern by membership blocs. "Negotiator" respondents were those who perceived conflict in decision-making but no consistent blocs of voters (Newman & Brown, 1992, p. 2).

The group studied consisted of school board members from 208 school districts representing six accreditation regions and 20 states. Of the 208 districts 100 districts returned their responses. In total, 409 board members returned the survey. Each

respondent completed a survey with seven questions covering varying modes of decision-making. The first question was meant to assess the amount of conflict board members perceived in the decision-making process. The second question was meant to measure their perception of the presence of voting blocs on the board. The other five questions assessed attributions of decision-making such as; the involvement of community members, whether the board searched for acceptable solutions through discussion, the influence of single individual board members, the use of majority voting for final decision making, and the use of superintendent's input (p. 2).

The study indicated that school boards have at least three common patterns of decision-making. Two of Blanchard's hypothesized patterns were found to exist across the nation, bipolar and unipolar. The bipolar group represented 29% of all studied and perceived themselves as being rarely unanimous and often in opposing blocs. The unipolar group represented 47% of all studied and was characterized by the absence of opposing blocs and frequently ended with unanimous decisions. Lastly, the study identified a new pattern of school board decision-making, which is named "open." Of all the boards studied, 24% were open and perceived themselves as frequently forming opposing blocs of opinions with the same members in each bloc but ending with a unanimous vote (p. 4). "The results of this study support the hypothesis that perceptions of conflict interact with and influence the educational decision making process (Newman & Brown, 1992, p. 5)."

In another study by Newman and Brown in 1993 yet more factors that influence board decisions were examined. "Many board members feel that decisions about the

curriculum and innovative educational programs should be made by educational experts; however, this does not have to be the case (Newman & Brown, 1993, p. 268).”

Newman and Brown wanted to find out if size of school and region of country made a difference on how school board members make decisions about educational programs. A survey methodology was used to carry out the research (p. 272). The population surveyed consisted of 293 school board members from 92 school districts from the six regional accreditation agencies representing 26 states (p. 271). “A stratified random sample was used for school board identification and levels for size stratification were based on Smith’s evaluation accreditation studies and consisted of three levels: less than 5,00 pupil enrollment (small), 5,000 to 10,000 pupil enrollment (medium), and over 10,000 (large)” (Newman & Brown, 1992, p. 271). The surveys were mailed to the schools, and in most cases the superintendents had the board members fill them out at the next board meeting. The survey consisted of four descriptions of school programs, two that were curricular in nature, and two that were social in nature. After reading the descriptions the board members answered four multiple-choice questions and four open-ended questions. When the surveys were completed they were returned to the superintendent who then sent them to the researchers. The only identification of each survey was the name of the school district; no individual board member was identified (p. 272-273).

The results of this study confirmed that school size and region are both factors that influence how board members make decisions. School size is related to school board members’ beliefs about what issues the community should be involved in and how the superintendent should be used to resolve conflicts. Board members from large school

districts believe that their community should be involved in board issues more than do board members from medium and small districts. Members from large districts also indicated that they used superintendents' recommendations less than members from medium did and small districts did. Board members from the northeast and from western regions were more likely to want to be involved in curricular and social program decisions than members from the north central region and southern regions were. North central and southern boards also indicated that they felt their communities are less involved. Overall the study implies that needs for information and relevant data are important parts of decision making in education (p. 277-279). "Providing information to board members is a complex and multifaceted activity needing further research (Newman & Brown, 1993, p. 279)."

Summary

Librarians have several duties that they fulfill on a daily basis and they tend to be very committed to their jobs as Rubin and Buttlar found in 1992. Riedling (2001) compiled librarians job descriptions and was able to pull from them a list of 900 duties, which offers more support for the fact that librarians today are very busy individuals. A sample of some of the duties are; plan the library program and make services and resources known to all patrons, assist in the evaluation of the library program to meet changing needs, provide guidance in selection, location, utilization, and evaluation of material, collaboratively plan units with teachers, advocate, promote, and teach reading and lifelong learning skills, provide orientation for new students and staff, provide training on library databases and other available technology, develops a broad view of the entire school curriculum, and provides appropriate information resources that support the

curriculum (Riedling, 2001). There is a need to find out what school board members know about school libraries so that librarians can focus on communicating with the board in the areas where they may not be receiving the information they need to make decisions that affect the library program.

Lance, Welbourn, and Hamilton-Pennel (1993) found correlations between quality library programs and higher test scores. In similar studies by Krashen (1995) and Rodney, Lance, and Hamilton-Pennel (2002) the correlation was again found. Schools that have quality library programs tend to have students who get higher test scores.

School board members are constantly faced with several crucial decisions. The research done by Brown, Newman, & Rivers (1985) indicates that some of the contextual variables that affect board decision-making are; importance of the decision, the amount of potential personal conflict, and the content of the program being considered. Newman and Brown (1993) also found that the size of school and the region of country influence how school boards make decisions. It is important to know some of the key facts about your school board before going to them with a presentation or request. The more one knows about her audience the more she can tune her presentation to be as effective as possible. It is also important to have an in depth knowledge of what one will be presenting to her board so that she is are prepared to answer any and all questions and to ensure that she sounds professional. When creating a presentation to a board about libraries for the purpose of increasing the board's knowledge two of the main topics that would need to be covered are the importance of libraries and a description of what librarians do.

Chapter 3

Methodology

School board members may make personnel and other budgeting decisions without being aware of the roles and contributions of the school library media program to student learning. This study examined the knowledge and perceptions that one school board of a district in Northwestern Iowa have of the school library media programs in their schools.

The survey method was used for this study. The survey method was used to gather the information. The data were presented in a quantitative manner; the statistics were then analyzed to determine the perceptions of those studied. One advantage of using a survey is that it is a cost effective way to gather information. The main cost was for paper to print the survey. Another advantage of using surveys to gather information is direct access to those that were studied.

Population Studied

The survey was given in one school district in Northwest Iowa during the summer of 2004. The school that was studied was the researcher's local K-12 school with a student population of approximately 600. The participants were the five school board members of the Hinton Community School District. The surveys were given to the superintendent who mailed them to the board members. The board members completed the survey and returned them at their next regularly scheduled meeting.

Design of Research Instrument

The survey form was developed (Appendix A) to assess the knowledge and perceptions of the school board members. The first part of the survey was open-ended

and the participants were asked to write down the five most important professional tasks they think are a school librarian's responsibility. The second part of the survey was a questionnaire that listed professional and non-professional duties that must be performed in a school library. The survey was coded for professional and non-professional tasks. The second part of the survey was further coded into clerical tasks, technical tasks, or one of the four main roles of a school librarian which are: information specialist, collaborator, teacher, and administrator. Those who completed the survey were asked to identify the duties that they believed belong to the librarian. The list of duties came from the librarian's roles as they are outlined in *Information Power; Building Partnerships for Learning* (Riedling, 2001) and from other published school librarian job descriptions.

Procedures

The purpose of the study was to show what school board members in Northwest Iowa know about school library programs. The surveys were hand delivered to the superintendent's office of the participating school district with a letter of request that they be filled out and returned at the next scheduled board meeting. The surveys required only five to ten minutes to complete. All survey responses were voluntary and anonymous. The individual board members were asked to not put their names on the surveys to assure anonymity.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

School board members may make decisions without being aware of the contributions of school library media programs to student learning. This study shows what levels of knowledge school board members in a small K-12 school district in Northwest Iowa have about their school library programs. In particular, the study focused on professional versus non-professional tasks and the four roles of a school librarian outlined in *Information Power; Building Partnerships for Learning* (Riedling, 2001). The survey was delivered to five board members. Four surveys were returned to the researcher. One questionnaire portion of the survey was thoughtlessly filled out and all of the answers were marked *yes*. For this reason the survey was considered invalid and not used for the analysis.

Table 1: Number of Professional Librarian's Tasks Recognized.

Board Member	Number of Professional Tasks Identified *
A	4
B	5
C	4
D	5

* 40% of the 5 board members were able to identify five professional tasks.

Table 2: Recognition of Professional Librarian's Tasks.

Tasks Offered	Information Specialist 8	Collaborator 4	Teacher 12	Administrator 11				
Tasks Identified	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	7	88	0	0	6	50	8	73
B	7	88	1	25	4	33	10	91
C	8	100	0	0	9	75	10	91

Hypothesis one stated that sixty percent of the board members in this study would be able to identify five professional tasks school librarians do. Of the four returned surveys, two were able to write down five professional tasks. Board member number four listed the following four tasks; “maintain all reading resources, work closely with teachers to assess students' reading needs for various grade levels, develop reading incentive programs to promote an interest in reading, and assist students with the use of library resources, print and technical, for research or leisure reading”. Ordering books and supplies and ordering movies and videos for teachers are two responses that were given by other participants. These are clerical tasks. Due to the fact that sixty percent of the members surveyed were not able to identify five professional tasks that school librarians do, hypothesis one is rejected.

Hypothesis two stated that sixty percent of the board members in this study will be able to recognize all of the tasks associated with the information specialist function of

a school librarian. Only board member C was able to correctly recognize all of the information specialist duties, as tasks librarians do. Board member A did not recognize providing inservice training for teachers and staff and board member B did not recognize the promotion of intellectual freedom as tasks that school librarians perform. Some tasks fall under more than one of the four roles of a school librarian, as do both of these tasks; however, the participants did not recognize these as librarian's duties at all. Since sixty percent of the members surveyed were not able to recognize all of the information specialist tasks of a school librarian, hypothesis two is rejected.

Hypothesis three stated that sixty percent of the board members in this study would be able to recognize all of the collaborative tasks that school librarians do. Of the four collaborative tasks on the survey, only one member was able to identify one collaborative task. Board member C correctly identified planning units with teachers as task that school librarians do. Board member A did not identify any of the collaborative tasks. Board member C must not have been clear on the tasks because the word "maybe" was written next to two of the collaborative tasks instead of the yes or no box being checked. Board member C checked no for the other two collaborative tasks. Due to the fact that sixty percent of the members in this study were not able to identify all of the collaborative tasks a school librarian does, hypothesis three is rejected.

Hypothesis four stated that sixty percent of the board members in this study would be able to recognize all of the teaching tasks that school librarians do. Of the twelve teaching tasks on the survey, board member C recognized ten. Board member A recognized seven of the teaching tasks, but failed to recognize teaching a unit with a teacher, teaching students how to use computers, teaching students how to write research

papers, teaching students how to do presentations, and providing inservice training for teachers and staff as teaching tasks. Board member B recognized only four of the teaching tasks. Many of the tasks not recognized by board member B were the same that were not recognized by board member A. Board member A also didn't recognize organizing and conducting book discussion groups or reading to students as tasks that school librarians do. Due to the fact that sixty percent of the board members in this survey were not able to recognize all of the teaching tasks that school librarians do, hypothesis four is rejected.

Hypothesis five stated that sixty percent of the board members in this study would be able to recognize the administrative tasks that school librarians do. Board member C recognized ten of the eleven tasks and wrote in maybe for the task of submitting statistical reports about the library to administrators. Board member B recognized ten also, however, this individual failed to recognize protecting intellectual freedom as a responsibility of school librarians. Board member A failed to recognize supervising professional aides, supervising student aides, and supervising volunteers as tasks that school librarians perform. Due to the fact that sixty percent of the board members in this study were not able to recognize all of the administrative tasks that school librarians do, hypothesis five is rejected.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations for Further Studies

Summary

School board members may make personnel and other budgeting decisions without being aware of the roles and contributions of school library media programs to student learning. This study demonstrated the levels of knowledge school board members in a small K-12 school in Northwest Iowa have about their school library programs. The board members in this study are the five members of a small school in Northwest Iowa with a student population of approximately 600.

The survey was given in two parts. For the first part of the survey, the participants were instructed to write down the top five professional tasks they believe are the responsibility of the school librarian. The second part of the survey consisted of a list of tasks. The participants were instructed to check yes if they believed the task was the responsibility of the school librarian and check no, if they believed the task was not the responsibility of the school librarian. The responses to the first part of the survey were coded according to the level of the task. The two levels used were professional and clerical. The tasks listed in the second portion of the survey were coded according to the levels of the tasks and function, of four professional roles of a school librarian. Some of the tasks listed in the second portion of the represented clerical or technical roles rather than librarian's roles and served as control devices.

Of the five delivered surveys, four were returned. The first portion of all four surveys were valid and used in this study. The second portion of one of the returned

surveys was invalid and not used in this study because all of the answers were simply marked yes.

All five hypotheses predicting sixty percent of the board members in this study would give knowledgeable responses to the survey data were rejected. While some of the members did recognize some of the professional duties for which school librarians are responsible, none of the members recognized all of the duties. Only one board member was able to recognize all of the duties in one of the categories on the second portion of the survey.

Conclusion

School board members are some of the most powerful individuals in a school system. In most cases in Northwest Iowa school board members are elected individuals who run for a seat on the board. School board members are also usually thought to be individuals with a great interest and care about the school they serve. It was interesting and disturbing to this researcher that of the five delivered surveys only four were returned and one of the second portions of the survey was completed without thoughtfulness and had to be discarded. If school board members want to be in this position of power, then they should take the responsibility for educational matters that go along with the position.

It was somewhat reassuring to find that of the board members in this study, the answers to the first portion of the survey were fairly accurate. The members were able to write out quite a few of the professional tasks that are the responsibility of a school librarian. All four of the returned surveys had the task of keeping the library stocked with current books listed in some fashion. All four of the responses also talked about reading in some manner, either by way of reading incentive programs or reading to children. This

researcher was glad that these tasks were included, but disappointed that some others were left out. There was no mention of collaborating with teachers. One of the most important tasks of a school librarian is to collaboratively teach with content area teachers. Although a few members mentioned that the librarian should assist students with finding books, there was no mention of actually teaching library skills to students as a class. Students need to get good books in their hands, but as importantly, students need to be able to come to the library and know how to use all of the resources on their own to find relevant and accurate information that best suits their needs at that specific time. One response to the first part of the survey was the task of ordering movies and videos selected by the classroom teachers. This researcher believes that this particular task does not even fall under the library program at all, but that it is a clerical responsibility. A school librarian may be able to provide instruction or give assistance to a teacher who is having difficulty placing an order.

The most disturbing findings of the second portion of the survey matched up with the most disturbing findings of the first portion of the survey. In the first portion, collaboration was completely left out of the responses. In the second portion, the disappointing responses were in the tasks coded as collaboration. Of the four collaborative tasks, only one was recognized by one of the board members in this study. One of the other board members wrote in "maybe" for two of the collaborative tasks. This information leads this researcher to wonder why collaboration is not recognized. Is it that superintendents and principals, major sources of information to board members, are not placing emphasis on collaboration, or is collaboration simply not used in the school? School board members are concerned with student achievement. Collaboration between

teachers and school librarians has been shown to increase student achievement. Why are school board members unaware of this?

The second poorest scores on the second portion of the survey were for the teaching tasks. School librarians are certified teachers, yet are not perceived as teachers. Again, research has shown that student learning is increased when school librarians give instruction to students, yet the board members in this study didn't even recognize such tasks as teaching students how to write research papers, teaching a unit with a teacher, teaching students how to use computers, or teaching students how to make presentations as tasks that are the responsibility of a school librarian.

This researcher has also come to believe that it is possible that board members are not getting the information they need about the school library programs in their schools. This researcher has come to the conclusion that the librarians need to begin advocating their programs and themselves to the individuals who supply the board with their information and directly to the board members themselves. It is highly unlikely that board members will seek out this information out on their own time, and who better to give accurate information than the librarian in charge of the program.

Recommendations for Further Studies

This researcher is led to believe that board members are not getting the information they need to make the very important decisions they make. Further, some of the information they are getting may be incorrect. This study needs to be replicated with other boards from schools of the same size and larger. This study should possibly be expanded upon to survey all of the board members under one Iowa AEA. Another

suggestion for further studies would be researching the effectiveness of an informative presentation given to new board members by the school librarian.

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