School librarians' advocacy for the profession: Results of a U.S. national survey

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As a result of eliminations in school librarian positions due to funding reductions in schools and school districts across the United States, library associations encourage school librarians to advocate for the profession. A U.S. national survey of 381 school librarians investigated present advocacy efforts, needs, obstacles, and successful methods. An overwhelming majority of school librarians believe that advocacy for the profession is important. Only half of the respondents reported engaging in advocacy activities. Respondents who reported position or funding threats were more likely to advocate and perceive a greater level of success in their advocacy efforts. The most frequent obstacles to advocacy were lack of time and lack of awareness. Future research should investigate advocacy impact on decision-making. Library associations are challenged to motivate school librarians to engage in the process of advocacy.

Introduction

In the past several years, the number of school librarians in the United States has greatly diminished. Currently, only 60% of K-12 public schools employ a state certified librarian (American Libraries, 2007). These eliminations prompted the American Library Association (ALA) to appoint a special Task Force on the Status of School Libraries. Since the adoption of its report (ALA, 2005) ALA and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) launched several initiatives to advocate for a state-certified librarian in every public school. For example, AASL created an Advocacy Toolkit (2006), and the ALA's policy-making Council adopted several resolutions on various aspects of school libraries including responses to position and funding elimination.

ALA and AASL's most ambitious school library advocacy activity to date is the improvement of school library activities under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (also known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). These improvements include maintaining dedicated funding for the Improving Literacy through School Libraries program, establishing state goals of having a school library staffed by a state-licensed school librarian in each public school, and allowing state and local professional development funds to be used for recruiting and training school librarians, also known as the SKILLs Act (AASL, 2010).

As a result of these position eliminations, library associations encourage school librarians to advocate for the profession. This study examines how school librarians advocate for the profession, as well as their advocacy needs, perceived obstacles to advocacy, and the importance of advocacy to the future of the profession.

Problem Statement

A significant body of literature, spanning nearly fifty years, indicates that school librarians and school library programs have an impact on student achievement (Gaver, 1963; Ireland, 2001). In the past two decades, researchers have conducted studies on the impact of school library programs on student achievement at a statewide level. These studies, originating with Colorado (Lance, Wellborn, & Hamilton-Pennell 1993; Lance, Rodney, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2000; Frances, Lance, & Lietzau, 2010) have been conducted in twenty states (see http://www.lrs.org/impact.php for a full accounting of the studies). The first iteration of the studies indicated that school library expenditures are a predictor of academic achievement. Additional predictors of student achievement revealed by the state studies include collection size and library staffing levels.

A second iteration of the state studies, conducted in Ohio, added qualitative research methods to understand the impact of school library programs on student achievement (Todd, Kuhlthau, & OELMA, 2004). The researchers found that "an effective school library, led by a credentialed school librarian who has a clearly defined role in information-centered pedagogy, plays a critical role in facilitating student learning for building knowledge" (Todd, Kuhlthau, & OELMA, 2004, p. 6). Taken together, the state studies create a compelling argument for the presence of a well-funded school library program staffed with a certified librarian.

However, the state studies have been met with some criticism, particularly that school library advocates often cite qualitative evidence or weak-to-moderate correlations when attempting to make the case for retaining school librarians (Callison, 2005). Keith Curry Lance, the architect of the state studies, stated that "no one thing could possibly exert an overwhelming influence relative to everything else on how a kid does in school" (Achterman, 2007, p. 52). However, this body of research provides significant evidence indicating the value added to student's academic development by the presence of a strong school library program led by a credentialed librarian.

Despite this evidence, school librarian positions continue to be eliminated across the United States. Little is understood about how individual school librarians advocate for school library positions and programs. A search of the literature revealed no empirical studies specifically addressing school librarians' advocacy behaviors, advocacy needs, perceived obstacles to advocacy, or importance of advocacy to the future of the profession. Therefore, this study addresses a significant gap in the literature regarding school librarian advocacy for the profession.

Review of the Literature

Definitions of Advocacy

There is no universal agreement on what it means to advocate for the library profession. Several library associations around the world have attempted to define advocacy for the profession. These definitions are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Definitions of advocacy by professional library associations.

Library Association	Definition of Advocacy
Canadian Association of Public Libraries	Advocacy is a planned, deliberate, sustained effort to raise awareness of an issue. It's an ongoing process in which support and understanding are built incrementally over an extended period of time.
Australian School Library Association	Advocacy attempts to influence the perceptions of the target audience by connecting with their agenda to demonstrate how the school library and the services of the teacher-librarian can advance the position of the school as an information literate

	learning community.
American Association of School Librarians	Advocacy is the on-going process of building partnerships so that others will act for and with you, turning passive support into educated action for the library media program.

While these definitions have much in common, there are some nuances worth exploring. The Canadian Association of Public Libraries definition focuses on raising awareness over a period of time. In contrast, the Australian School Library Association definition centers on influencing others' agendas, and the American Association of School Librarians definition is concerned with building partnerships and alliances so that others may act for the school library program.

The varied definitions suggest that advocacy is complex and multi-faceted. No single approach can be construed as the "right" way to advocate. However, these definitions can also serve as a guide for how to advocate in various circumstances and where stakeholders may have different levels of understanding of the school library program. One must raise awareness about the importance of a program before persuading others to act on his or her behalf, for example. These definitions explain how library associations encourage their members to think about approaches to advocacy.

In the present study, survey respondents were not provided with a contextual definition of advocacy. Therefore, the respondents' understanding of advocacy differed considerably. Some respondents indicated that advocacy is analogous to promotion and awareness, and others likened it to political action at the local, state, and national levels.

School Library Advocacy

A review of the literature on school library advocacy consists of strategies and techniques for advocacy, using evidence-based practice as an advocacy tool, and reports of successful advocacy initiatives. Strategies include self-education about the primary issues facing school libraries (Williams, 2006). J. Linda Williams, a past president of the American Association of School Librarians, states, "A well-developed advocacy program markets, promotes, and rallies people around the mission, issues, and philosophies of a school library media program. As a result, library advocacy must be based on specific needs and supported with evidence as well as tied to the library's overall goals and ongoing public awareness program" (Williams, 2006, p. 4).

Bush (2007) suggests telling the story of the school library through journaling and then publishing in a journal, magazine or newspaper that stakeholders are likely to read. Rather than publishing in professional library journals or magazines, library advocates suggest that outreach to the non-library community is essential. Williams (2006) indicates that libraries continue to be targeted for cuts because

> we have not done a good enough job in consistently getting the word out and showing we make a difference. I feel that the reason we get hit so hard with budget and position cuts is that no one—especially those in decision-making positions—really knows what we do (p. 4).

This thread resonates throughout the library advocacy literature (e.g., Hainer, 2005; Leverett, 2001).

Others encourage political advocacy through participation in sponsored events. Sandy Schuckett, a longtime school library advocate, describes how to participate in ALA's National Library Legislative Day (2005). She provides an overview of the event and advice on scheduling and conducting congressional visits. Schuckett states, "You are one of a select few concerned citizens who has taken the time to fight for something you strongly believe in: your library media center and the students it serves. You are a true library media center advocate" (p. 28).

Another branch in the school library advocacy literature concerns evidence-based practice (EBP). Stemming from evidence-based medicine, this technique is defined as "the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients"(Sackett, Straus, Richardson, Rosenberg, & Haynes, 2000) and is utilized in the social sciences and librarianship. Todd (2003) in his *Evidence-based manifesto,* states:

First, [EBP] asks us to have a very clear and precise knowledge of and insight into the research of our profession that demonstrates the differences that an effective school library makes to the learning goals of the school. Second, it asks us to mesh that knowledge with our own wisdom and experience to build professional work practices that enable us to achieve significant student learning outcomes. Third, it asks us to look at our own school communities and work towards providing the evidence of how our local school library makes a difference — it asks us to articulate clearly and unequivocally how our school library helps students learn.

Todd's subsequent work on EBP (2006, 2008a, 2008b; Loertscher & Todd, 2003) strengthens the concept that school librarians' actions and claims should be based on evidence. Asselin (2002) suggests applying EBP techniques prior to making claims often cited as reasons for retaining the school librarian and library program, including the effects of staffing and staff qualifications on the quality of school library programs and services. Braxton (2003) describes a successful evidenced-based advocacy campaign: "By demonstrating exactly how library services make a difference, the librarians were able to educate a group of people who held ultimate control over their positions even though the group knew little about those positions" (p. 41).

Finally, a significant number of reports of successful advocacy initiatives are available in the literature (e.g., Burris, 2006; Giambra, 1998; Russell, 2004) which describe the reasons for advocacy and report the outcomes of the initiatives. One of the most successful advocacy campaigns was initiated by the "Spokane Moms" (Kenney, 2008), who successfully lobbied for higher school library building and staffing standards in Washington state. Susan McBurney, Denette Hill, and Lisa Layera Brunkan, parents at a Spokane elementary school, saw the impacts of cutting a library program on their children and launched a full-scale state-wide advocacy initiative. Their advocacy model brought enthusiasm from the U.S. school librarian community. Kenney (2008) states, "The accomplishments of McBurney, Hill, and Brunkan-true heroes-are certainly great for Washington's kids. But they're also great for the rest of us. Because on the way to providing good school libraries for their children, these three women created a "how-to" for school library advocacy" (p. 11).

 However, not all advocacy initiatives are successful. For example, despite well-organized advocacy campaigns in Medina, Washington (Whelan, 2009) and Mesa, Arizona (Whelan, 2008), these districts still chose to eliminate librarians. The unevenness of decisions to retain or eliminate is perplexing; little is understood about why some school districts choose to retain school librarian positions while others do not.

Research Questions

This study attempts to deepen understandings of why and how school librarians advocate for the profession. The primary research questions in the study were:

1. What advocacy efforts are being or have been undertaken by school librarians?
2. What do school librarians identify as their advocacy needs, present obstacles to advocacy, and successful methods of advocacy, and how do they perceive the success of advocacy?
3. What is the correlation between respondents' perceived level of advocacy success and demographic characteristics?
4. What is the correlation between position or funding threats, reductions, or eliminations and the perceived level of advocacy success?
5. What specific advocacy efforts do school librarians engage in, and what is the perception of the success of these efforts?

Through this study it is hoped that more can be understood about the characteristics, perceptions, and behaviors of the school librarian as advocate.

Methodology

Participants

A total of 381 respondents completed the survey. Over three-quarters of the respondents (76.8%) were practicing school librarians, almost 10% were school library media supervisors, and nearly 16% were educators of school librarians. 19.5% had 6-10 years experience in the profession. Most respondents (80.1%) possessed a master's degree, with 13.7% holding a bachelor's and 5.7% holding a doctorate. Respondents were also asked if they held a school library media credential as defined by their state. An overwhelming majority (90.2%) replied that possessed a credential. Over half of the respondents (57.3%) reported membership in the American Library Association and 44.6% belonged to the American Association of School Librarians. Membership in the state library or school media association was more common, with 78.8% of respondents reporting membership.

Table 2. Demographic description of participants.

Demographic Variable	n	Total (%)
Employment position		
Building-level librarian	282	76.2
School library supervisor	35	9.5
School library educator/professor	59	15.9
Years of Professional Experience		
0-2	55	14.1
3-5	63	16.2
6-10	76	19.5
11-15	55	14.1
16-20	44	11.3
21-30	52	13.4
30+	44	11.3
Highest Degree		
Bachelor's	53	13.7
Master's	310	80.1
Doctorate	22	5.7
Hold a state credential		
Yes	348	90.2
No	37	9.6
Association Membership		
American Library Association	221	57.3
American Association of School Librarians	172	44.6
Other ALA Division	86	22.3
State library or school media association	304	78.8
Local library or school media association	138	35.8
Do not belong to a library association	37	9.6

Survey Instrument

The researcher adapted a survey from a study of advocacy in the counseling profession (Myers & Sweeney, 2004). This survey was chosen for adaptation because of the content and previous field-testing of the instrument. The survey asked questions in six categories: (1) demographic information, (2) nature and success of advocacy efforts, (3) perception of current advocacy needs for the profession, (4) resources available for advocacy, (5) current obstacles to advocacy, and (6)

perceptions about the importance of advocacy to the future of the school library media profession. The survey is reproduced in the Appendix.

Sixty-three respondents from the researcher's state school library association tested a draft of the survey. Survey questions were refined for clarity with this smaller group before collecting responses nationally. The survey was distributed in an electronic format in August 2008 to two U.S. school library media email discussion lists in the United States: *AASL Forum*, the email list of the American Association of School Librarians with 638 subscribers; and *LM_NET*, an email list with over 14,000 subscribers. A cover letter described the survey and contained information about institutional review board procedures. The survey was open for two weeks; one week into the response collection, an email reminder sent to the discussion lists encouraged those who had not yet completed the survey to respond.

The survey was also disseminated beyond these two email lists, including several state school library association email lists of which the researcher was made aware. Because of the nature of electronic communication, it is difficult to determine how many potential respondents received the survey invitation and therefore impossible to declare an accurate response rate.

Data Analysis

Frequency of selection was used to analyze the nature and success of advocacy efforts, perception of current needs for advocacy, resources available for advocacy, and current obstacles to advocacy, and the importance of advocacy to the future of the profession. Open-ended comments were categorized descriptively.

Spearman's correlation coefficient was performed to assess the correlation between the perceived level of advocacy success to demographic variables. Chi-square was performed to determine the correlation between position or funding threats, reductions, or eliminations and the perceived level of advocacy success. Crosstabulation was performed to assess the frequency of engagement in specific advocacy efforts relative to a position or funding threat, reduction, or elimination and also to assess the frequency of engagement in specific advocacy efforts relative to the perceived level of advocacy success.

Results

Participants Involved in Position or Funding Threats

The survey asked respondents if in the past three years they had been involved in a situation where school library positions or funding had been reduced, threatened, or eliminated. Over half (51.9%) reported that school library funding or positions were reduced, threatened, or eliminated. About one-quarter (27%) of the respondents provided optional comments regarding funding elimination. These open-ended comments described respondents' experiences with position elimination or reduction and elimination of expenditures in the school library budget in their schools and school districts.

Nature and Success of Advocacy Efforts

A second set of questions inquired about the nature of advocacy efforts in which the respondents had been involved, and whether or not those efforts were successful. Table 2 provides frequency of selection. Over half of the respondents (52.8%) reported providing comments to decision-makers (school district administrators, school board members, or legislators) through phone calls, emails, faxes or letters. Over half (51.2%) of the respondents reported reading and/or distributing literature or information on school library advocacy. Forty-four percent of respondents reported participation in committee or volunteer work in their library association or a similar group (Table 3).

Table 3. Nature of advocacy efforts.

Nature of Advocacy Efforts	n	Total (%)
Provided comments to decision makers through phone calls, emails, etc.	201	52.8
Read/distributed information on school library advocacy	195	51.2
Committee/volunteer work in associations or groups	169	44.4
Encouraged others to write/speak to decision makers	158	41.5
Speaking at a committee or board hearing	82	21.5
Attended library legislative days or other organized events	60	15.7
Participated in a demonstration/rally	22	5.8
Organized a demonstration/rally	4	1.0

When asked about success of advocacy efforts over the past three years, 57.1% were successful, and 18.1% were not successful. One-quarter (24.8%) of respondents replied that they had not been involved in school library media advocacy efforts within the past three years (Table 4).

Table 4. Success of advocacy efforts.*

Result	n	Total (%)
Successful	205	57.1
Unsuccessful	65	18.1
Did not advocate	89	24.8
Total	359	100

* The survey question regarding advocacy success asked respondents to report their level of success as high, medium, or low (see Appendix A, question 8). For the purposes of data analysis, the responses "high" and "medium" were merged into a category called "successful" and "low" was renamed "not successful". These two categories were combined with the number of respondents who reported they did not advocate to create the advocacy success variable.

Spearman's correlation coefficient (two-tailed) was performed to determine the correlation between demographic variables and perceived level of advocacy success (Table 5). The results of the Spearman correlation test indicated a statistically significant negative correlation between the perceived level of advocacy success and years of experience (-.29, $p=<.05$) and degree held (-.20, $p=<.01$). The test also indicated a statistically significant correlation between the perceived level of advocacy success and whether the respondent held a credential (.14, $p=<.01$).

Table 5. Demographic variables and perceived level of advocacy success with Spearman's correlation coefficient.

Demographic variable	Correlation coefficient ($p<.01$)
Years experience	-.29
Degree held	-.20
Credential	.14

Chi-square analysis was performed to determine the correlation between whether positions or funding were threatened, reduced or eliminated and advocacy activity (Table 6). Observed and expected data were compared to determine the Chi-square goodness of fit, which indicated that there was no significant difference between the expected and observed outcome.

Table 6. Chi-square- Position/funding threatened, reduced, or eliminated and advocacy activity.

		Advocated	Did not advocate	Total
Position or	Yes	160.00[a]	33.00	193
funding		145.98[b]	47.00	
Threatened/	No	107.00	53.00	160
Reduced/		121.00	38.98	
Eliminated				
Totals		267.00	86.00	353

[a] Observed frequency, Chi-square: 11.34, 1 df, $p=<.05$
[b] Expected frequency, Chi-square: 12.19, 1 df, $p=<.05$
*5 respondents who marked "I don't know" on the question about position funding were eliminated from this analysis.

The results of the analysis indicate a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. Those who experience position or funding threats, reductions, or eliminations are more likely to participate in advocacy activity.

Chi-square analysis was also performed to determine the correlation between whether positions or funding were threatened, reduced or eliminated and perceived level of advocacy success (Table 7). Observed and expected data were compared to determine the Chi-square goodness of fit, which again indicated that there was no significant difference between the expected and observed outcome.

Table 7. Chi-square-Perceived level of advocacy success and position/funding threatened, reduced, or eliminated.

		Level of advocacy success			Total
		Successful	Unsuccessful	Did not advocate	
Position or	Yes	111.00[a]	49.00	33	193
funding		110.44[b]	35.54	47	
Threatened/	No	91.00	16.00	53	160
Reduced/		91.55	29.46	339	
Eliminated					
Totals count		202	65	86	353

[a] Observed frequency, Chi-square: 24.15, 4 df, $p=<.05$
[b] Expected frequency, Chi-square: 20.48, 2 df, $p=<.05$
*5 respondents who marked "I don't know" on the question about position funding were eliminated from this analysis.

The results of the chi-square analysis indicate a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. Those who experience position or funding threats are more likely to perceive a greater level of success in their advocacy efforts.

Crosstabulation was performed to assess the frequency of engagement in specific advocacy efforts relative to a position or funding threat, reduction, or elimination (Table 8). Respondents who faced funding or position threats tended to engage in specific advocacy activities. The respondents most frequently provided comments to decision-makers such as school district administrators or elected officials (n=123), encouraged others to provide comments (n=105), participated in committee work (n=101), read or distributed literature (n=81), or spoke at a hearing or board meeting (n=62).

Table 8. Crosstabulation- Position/funding threat, elimination or reduction relative to specific advocacy efforts.

Nature of advocacy effort	Position/funding threat			
	Yes	No	I don't know	Total
Association committee work	101	66	1	168
Read/distributed literature	81	109	5	195
Attended Library Legislative Day	48	12	0	60
Spoke at hearing/board meeting	62	20	0	82
Provided comments to decision makers	123	78	0	201
Encouraged others to provide comments	105	51	1	157
Participated in demonstration/rally	19	3	0	22
Organized demonstration/rally	4	0	0	4
Other efforts	7	1	0	8

Crosstabulation was also performed to determine the frequency of engagement in specific advocacy efforts relative to the perceived level of advocacy success (Table 9). Respondents who were successful in their advocacy efforts most frequently provided comments to decision-makers (n=152), read or distributed advocacy literature (n=144), participated in committee work (n=130), and encouraged others to provide comments to decision-makers (n=113).

Table 9. Crosstabulation- Perceived level of advocacy success relative to specific advocacy efforts.

Nature of advocacy effort	Level of advocacy success			
	Successful	Not successful	Did not advocate	Total
Association committee work	130	28	8	166
Read/distributed literature	144	40	7	191
Attended Library Legislative Day	53	7	0	60
Spoke at hearing/board meeting	66	15	1	82
Provided comments to decision makers	152	45	1	198
Encouraged others to provide comments	113	41	0	154
Participated in demonstration/rally	17	5	0	22
Organized demonstration/rally	4	0	0	4
Other efforts	6	2	0	8

Perception of Current Advocacy Needs for the Profession

The survey asked what respondents perceived as the current advocacy needs for the profession. Listing six possible needs, participants checked the options they considered the most important. The most frequently selected need was "publicize the services school libraries and library media specialists provide" (89.8%) followed by "improve the public and professional image of school librarians" (73.5%). "Pursuing legislative action on behalf of jobs for school librarians" (67.7%) was also frequently selected, as was "assure that school librarians have equal access to employment with other education professionals" (50.1%) and "develop a common definition/identity for school librarians" (47%). The least frequently selected option was "hire paid staff/consultants to advocate for school librarians" with 19.7%. Forty respondents (10.4%) provided open-ended comments. Most comments referenced pursuing legislative action (*n*=15) or improving the image and perceptions of school librarians (*n*=14).

Resources Available for Advocacy

Participants were asked to respond to a list of choices concerning the resources for advocacy currently available to them. Table 10 summarizes the responses. The most frequently cited resource was professional associations (53.4%), followed by committees and volunteers (49.1%), advocacy toolkits (36.4%), coalitions with other educational groups (34%), government relations/lobbying staff (24.5%), advocacy training (23.5%), and paid library association staff (20.8%). Resources least available to respondents included consultants (5.1%) and funding (4.6%). 21.3% noted that they were unsure about available resources for advocacy.

Table 10. Resources available for advocacy.

Resource	N	Total (%)
Professional associations	198	53.4
Committees/volunteers	182	49.1
Advocacy toolkits	135	36.4
Coalitions with other educational groups	126	34.0
Government relations/lobbying staff	91	24.5
Advocacy Training	87	23.5
I am unsure/I don't know	79	21.3
Paid library association staff	77	20.8
Consultants	19	5.1
Funding	17	4.6

Perceptions of Current Obstacles to Advocacy

The survey asked respondents to indicate the current obstacles to school library advocacy. Respondents identified the following obstacles: lack of time (62.1%), lack of awareness (49.3%), resistance by public decision-makers (38.7%), not enough money (37.6%), not a priority (31.5%), lack of advocacy training (31.7%), lack of collaboration (30.7%), lack of leadership (28.5%), inadequate resources (26.1%), little interest in advocacy (22.9%), not having a toolkit/information packet (8%), and opposition by other organizations (6.1%).

Most respondents who provided open-ended comments for this question indicated a lack of time. Examples representative of comments were: *"I have over 800 students, no aide and a budget of $3,000 annually. Do you really think I have time for advocacy?"* and *"We are too busy just doing our many jobs at our local schools."*

Importance of Advocacy to the Future of the School Library Profession

The final survey question asked participants to rate the importance of advocacy to the future of the school library profession. The vast majority of respondents (81.2%) reported that advocacy was very important to the future of the profession, while 18.5% stated that it was moderately important. Only one respondent (0.3%) reported that advocacy was not important to the future of the school library profession.

Discussion and Directions for Future Research

Advocacy and Demographic Indicators

Respondents' perceived level of advocacy success was likely to decrease with the level of experience in the profession. Similarly, perception of success was likely to decrease with additional degrees obtained. While the Spearman's correlation does not identify causal relationships between variables, we can hypothesize that librarians with more years of experience might not see an advocacy victory as impactful as a librarian with less experience. It is possible that a less experienced librarian has perhaps not fully internalized the political realities of the profession.

Conversely, perceived advocacy success is likely to rise when the librarian holds a credential. A possible explanation for this finding is that a credentialed librarian may feel more empowered as a result of his or her legitimate status in the eyes of the educational organization. These are possible explanations that necessitate further study.

Funding Threats/Eliminations and Advocacy

The analysis indicated that those who experience position or funding threats, reductions, or eliminations are more likely to participate in advocacy activity. This suggests that a funding crisis is a primary motivator for advocacy. Similarly, those who experienced position or funding threats, reductions or eliminations perceived greater success in advocacy activities.

However, the American Library Association cautions librarians to not wait for a crisis to begin advocating (ALA, 2010). Does advocacy work when librarians are not faced with a funding crisis? A future study should address the impact and success of advocacy efforts conducted outside of a crisis event.

Specific Advocacy Efforts and Perception of Success

The crosstabulation analysis performed to assess the frequency of engagement in specific advocacy efforts relative to a position or funding threat, reduction, or elimination revealed a preference for providing comments and encouraging others to provide comments to decision-makers, followed closely by professional association work. Similarly, those who provided comments to decision-makers also perceived the highest levels of success. It appears that the most accessible form of

advocacy, contacting decision-makers and elected officials, seems to be popular and worthwhile for the library profession. However, the question remains whether these advocacy activities have a positive impact on the profession, which should be further explored.

Perceived Importance and Engagement in Advocacy

Respondents overwhelmingly believe advocacy is important to the future of the profession. Furthermore, when respondents engage in advocacy, those efforts tend to be successful. There are different ways that respondents advocate; some are more direct than others. However, a significant number of respondents do not know or are unsure of available resources for advocacy, and a significant number of respondents do not advocate. This indicates a gap between school librarians' perceived importance of advocacy for the profession and their engagement in advocacy activities. With the exception of one respondent, all felt that advocacy was very or moderately important to the future of the profession.

The survey reveals that the notion of the importance of advocacy is not necessarily reflected in the actions of school librarians. While school librarians generally believe that advocacy is important, only half of the study participants engaged in conversations with decision makers through phone calls, emails, letters, or faxes, and even fewer encouraged others to do the same. One-quarter of the respondents reported not participating in advocacy activities in the past three years.

A possible explanation for the reticence to engage in advocacy on behalf of the profession is a combination of the perceived lack of time for advocacy and the idea that professional associations should be responsible for advocacy. One respondent felt that the burden should be placed on the association: *"Missed opportunities in terms of ALA's actions - you wouldn't find doctors feeling like they individually have to educate the public about what a doctor is!"*

Confirming this perception, a low number of participants indicated that advocacy assistance was available in the form of consultants and paid lobbying or association staff. Library associations could mitigate this discrepancy by aggressively recruiting school librarians, offering continuing professional development on advocacy, preparing materials that assist with advocacy efforts and advocating on behalf of the profession. Additional research should address the relationship between and impact of library advocacy by individuals and professional associations.

Limitations

The survey utilized a convenience sample with an estimated response rate of 2%. Additionally, the survey captured the responses of self-selected, active participants in professional email lists and state/local school library associations. In other words the study surveyed those who are engaged at some level beyond their individual schools. The very fact that these school librarians belong to national email lists indicates at least a minimal engagement in the profession, if only through involvement in email communication with other librarians outside of their schools. This study did not include the much larger population of school librarians who do not belong to associations. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009) at the time of this survey, there were 50,553 school librarians in the United States yet fewer than 8,255 belonged to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL, 2008).

The survey asked questions related to the perceived success of advocacy efforts and did not address outcomes of advocacy activities, which should be addressed in future research. A critical question regarding advocacy is whether or not specific advocacy activities undertaken by librarians are successful in preventing funding and position elimination. This study does not address this question. While the study described the landscape of advocacy by school librarians through correlative measures, it stops short of identifying causation. Future studies of this nature should employ more rigorous sampling, include questions related to advocacy impact on decision making and employ more sophisticated quantitative measures to explore relationships between variables.

Conclusions

In the context of the school library media profession, advocacy is a highly personal and local effort. Gary Hartzell, a former school administrator and professor of educational administration, states, "if you elect not to engage, you'll probably lose your opportunity to significantly impact the decision-making process (2003, p. 9). While national library associations must motivate school librarians to engage in the process of advocacy, the majority of advocacy challenges happen at the local and state levels. State and local library associations, with the assistance of national associations such as ALA and AASL, are in the greatest position to effect advocacy activities. National, state, and local library associations are challenged to motivate school librarians to engage in the process of advocacy. Furthermore, significant research should be undertaken in order to understand both the motivation to advocate as well as the impact of advocacy on the profession.

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National Survey on School Library Advocacy Behaviors

1. What is your employment position?

Building-level school librarian

School librarian supervisor (district -level)

School librarian educator/professor

School library consultant

School library paraprofessional/technician/aide

Other (please specify)

2. How many years of experience do you have in the school library field?

0-2

3-5

6-10

11-15

16-20

21-30

30+

3. What is your highest degree?

Associate's

Bachelor's

Master's

Doctorate

No degree

4. Do you hold a credential or certification in school library media, as defined by your state?

Yes

No

I don't know

5. Are you a member of your state, local, and/or national library association? Check all that apply.

American Library Association (ALA)

American Association of School Librarians

Other ALA Division (ALSC, YALSA, etc.)

State library or school media association

Local library or school media association

I don't belong to a library association

6. In the past three years, have you been involved in a situation where school library positions or funding has been threatened, reduced, or eliminated?

Yes

No

I don't know

Optional-provide the context of your situation here.

7. In the past three years, have you been involved in any of the following school library advocacy activities?

Committee/volunteer work in library association or other groups

Read/distributed literature or information on school library advocacy

Attended library legislative days or other organized events to influence decision-makers

Speaking at a committee or board hearing

Provided comments to decision makers, through phone calls, faxes, emails, or letters

Encouraged others to write/speak to decision makers

Participated in a demonstration/rally

Organized a demonstration/rally

I have not been involved in advocacy efforts in the past three years.

Other (please specify)

8. If you have been involved in school library advocacy efforts in the past three years, please rate your level of success.

Highly successful

Moderately successful

Not very successful

I haven't participated in advocacy efforts

Please provide any comments about your advocacy efforts (optional).

10. What are the current advocacy needs for the school library profession? Check all that apply.

Improve the public and professional image of school librarians

Publicize the services school libraries and librarians provide

Pursue legislative action on behalf of jobs for school librarians

Assure that school librarians have equal access to employment with other education professionals

Develop a common definition/identity for school librarians

Hire paid staff/consultants to advocate for school librarians

I don't know/am unsure

Other (please specify)

11. What resources are currently available for your advocacy efforts? Check all that apply.

Committees/volunteers

Coalitions with other educational groups

Government relations/lobbying staff

Paid library association staff

Funding

Consultants

Professional Associations

Advocacy Training

Advocacy Toolkits or Information Kits

I am not involved in advocacy efforts

12. What are the current obstacles to school library advocacy? Check all that apply.

Lack of advocacy training

Opposition by other organizations

Little interest in advocacy

Not a priority

Lack of leadership

Not having a toolkit/information packet

Not enough money

I'm not sure/don't know

Lack of awareness

Resistance by public decision-makers

Lack of collaboration

Inadequate resources

Lack of time

I don't know/am unsure

Other (please specify)

13. How important is school library advocacy to the future of the profession?

Very important

Moderately important

Not important

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