

# ALA American Library Association

## THE CONDITION OF U.S. LIBRARIES: SCHOOL LIBRARY TRENDS, 1999-2009

[Prepared December, 2009 for ALA Senior Management and Unit Managers]

Denise M. Davis  
Director, ALA Office for Research & Statistics  
[dmdavis@ala.org](mailto:dmdavis@ala.org)



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## About the Report

The full report – *The Condition of U.S. Libraries: Trends, 1999-2009* - highlights US economic trends (2009) and summarizes trends in public, school and academic libraries during the current decade for: Number of Libraries and Population Served, Expenditures, Staffing, and Services. The compilation was prepared in December 2009 for the staff and member leaders of the American Library Association to support its planning activities.

This report is excerpted from the full report and presents the economic landscape and detail about school libraries.

Data are compiled from multiple sources:

- Data about school libraries are derived from national surveys administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/libraries/>).
- There is limited longitudinal national data about school libraries. Data collected by the ALA American Association of School Librarians (AASL) published as *School Libraries Count!* are included in this summary and offer percentile distributions for some school library trends presented in this summary  
[[www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/researchandstatistics/slcsurvey/slcsurvey.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/researchandstatistics/slcsurvey/slcsurvey.cfm)].

In addition, a brief overview of the 2008-2009 economic downturn and its impact on state fiscal planning are provided.

## America values its libraries

The American Library Association (ALA) conducts surveys of the public at various intervals to understand household use of public libraries and perceived value of public, school and academic libraries. Most recently, in a January 2009 telephone household survey, KRC Research<sup>1</sup> found that:

American households reported using their public libraries more often in 2009

- 25.4 million Americans reported using their public library more than 20 times in the last year, up from 20.3 million households in 2006.
- The average number of in-person public library visits rose to 12.7 in 2009 from 9.1 in 2006.
- Use of the public library by computer (from home, work or school) doubled from 2006 to 2009 (6 times per year, up from 2.9 times in 2006).
- 22% of Americans visited their public library by computer from home, office or school more often in the last 6 months. This percentage may seem low, but it is about 51 million Americans.

After borrowing library materials, Americans rank entertainment (35%) and educational purposes, such as for homework or taking a class (28%), as the top two reasons for using the library. That's more than 145.8 million Americans.

The value of libraries to American households is unquestioned. A survey conducted in 2009 by KRC Research for the ALA found that

- More than 217 million Americans agree or strongly agree that the public library improves the quality of life in their community. This is an increase from 209.8 million reported in 2006. (KRC 2009)
- More than 222 million Americans agree or strongly agree that because it provides free access to materials and resources, the public library plays an important role in giving everyone a chance to succeed. This is an increase from 216.6 million reported in 2006. (KRC 2009)

*When asked about school libraries*

- 97 percent of Americans agree (224.5 million) that school library programs are an essential part of the education experience because they provide resources to students and teachers.
- 96 percent of Americans agree (222 million) that school libraries are important because they give every child the opportunity to read and learn.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.krcresearch.com/default.htm>

- 92 percent of Americans agree (213 million) that school library programs are a good value for the tax dollar.

*When asked about academic libraries*

- 95 percent of Americans (220 million) agree that college and research libraries are an essential part of the learning community.
- 97 percent of Americans (224.5 million) agree that college and research libraries connect users with a world of knowledge.

## The economic downturn: an overview

The economic downturn that began in 2008 has had significant impact on public and private institutions, among them libraries. The full impact is difficult to articulate and the data challenging to assemble. What we do know is that flat funding has been an obstacle – perhaps even a chronic problem - for many libraries this entire decade. A 2006 ALA survey exposed the level funding trend, with public libraries reporting that level (flat) funding had been a challenge as early as 2003.<sup>2</sup> A 2009 survey conducted as part of the *Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study* revealed a worsening of library funding – about 20 percent reported flat funding continuing in FY2010 and a majority reported budget reductions, about 20 percent reported 5-to-10 percent reductions in FY2010 from FY2009.

As communities and academic campuses develop future fiscal plans it is clear that public, academic and school libraries are visibly hard hit. In fall 2009 report prepared by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 34 states had reported cuts to higher education, which will impact academic libraries and 25 states had cut funding to K-12, which will impact school libraries. Many organizations and government agencies are grappling with the impact of the economic downturn and a few reports are of particular note.

A recent report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a non-partisan organization focusing on policy affecting low- and moderate-income families and individuals, issued a series of reports in October 2009 regarding state budget reductions and projected mid-year shortfalls in 2010. Two reports of note include:

- An Update on State Budget Cuts: At Least 41 States Have Imposed Cuts That Hurt Vulnerable Residents; Federal Economic Recovery Funds and State Tax Increases Are Reducing the Harm. Nicholas Johnson, Phil Oliff, and Jeremy Koulish (October 20, 2009) <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=1214>
- Recession Continues to Batter State Budgets; State Responses Could Slow Recovery. Elizabeth McNichol and Nicholas Johnson (October 20, 2009) <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=711>

The following slides present the number of states reporting budget cuts by the group or sector impacted, including

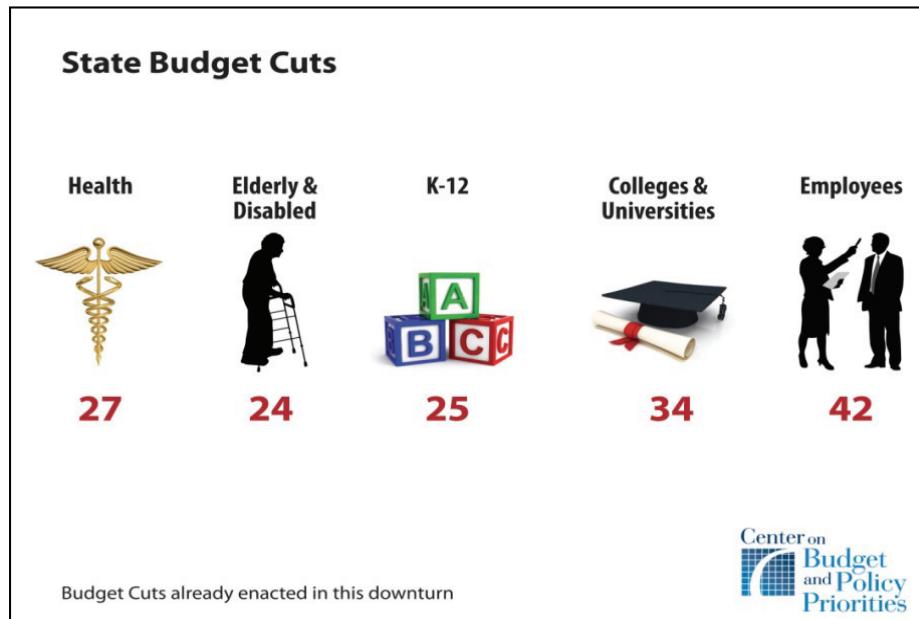
- health
- elderly & disabled
- K-12
- colleges & universities
- employees

and are excerpted from a presentation made by Phil Oliff and Mike Leachman of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and were distributed through a Committee for Education Funding (CEF) ALERT, "Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (FCM Notes)" (2 November 2009).<sup>3</sup> All slides are the property of

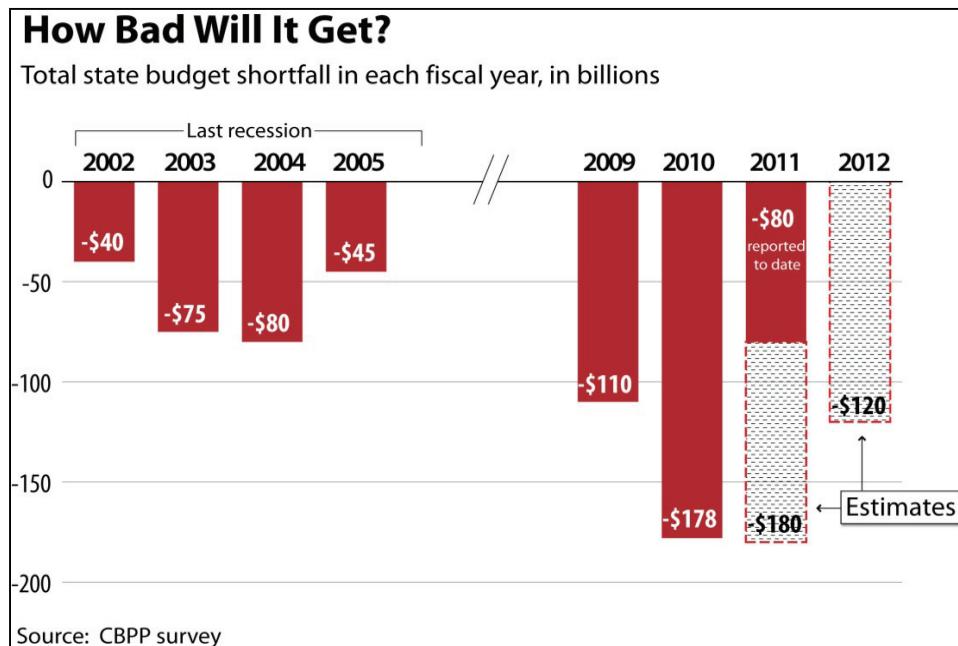
<sup>2</sup> (<http://www.ala.org/ala/research/librarystats/public/fundingissuesinuspis.pdf>).

<sup>3</sup> The Committee for Education Funding (<http://www.cef.org/>) is a member organization working to improve federal funding for the US education system.

the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (<http://www.cbpp.org/>) and links to individual slides are noted as available.



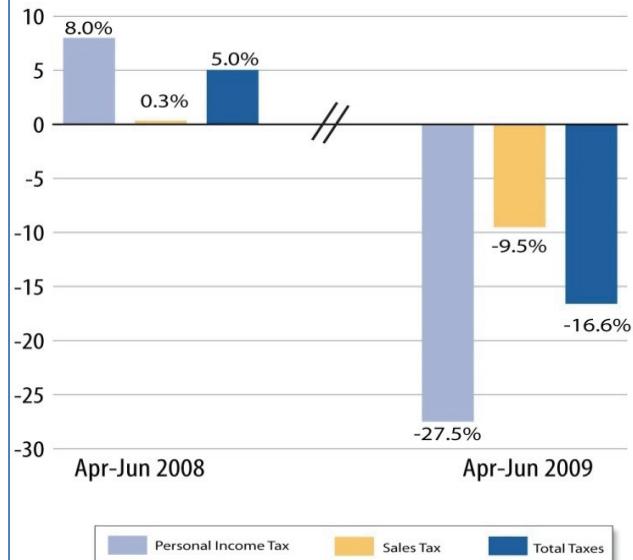
Source: (CBPP 2009) <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=1214>



Source: (CBPP 2009) <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=711>

## State Tax Revenues are Falling.

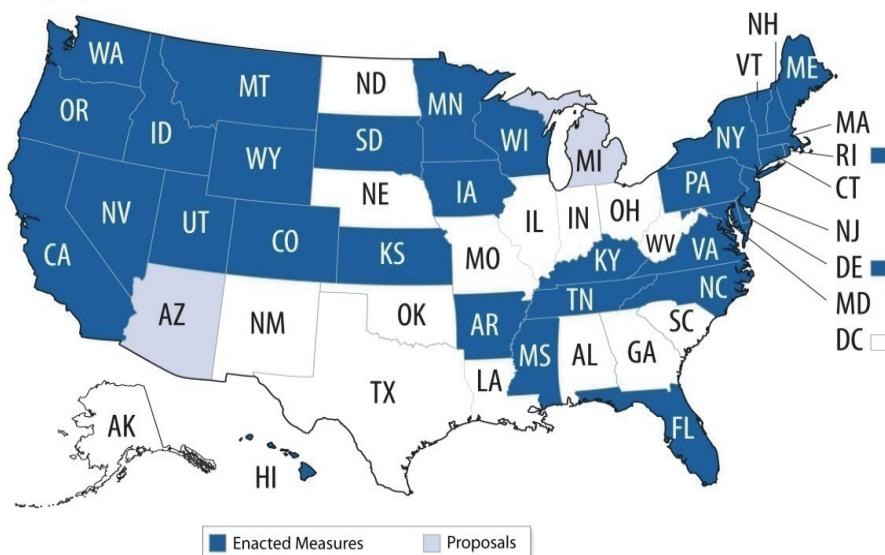
Percent change in April to June state revenue collections, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009.



Source: The Census Bureau.

## 2009 State Tax Increases.

Lawmakers in 35 states have enacted or are considering proposals to increase taxes and fees.



Note: Status as of October 14, 2009.

Source: (CBPP 2009) <http://www.statefiscal.org/>

## Summary of Library Trends

Understanding the condition of libraries is critical to interpreting the impact of the current economic downturn for communities, states and the nation. The charts and graphs that follow present the most currently available national trend information for school libraries. Figures are presented as whole numbers, percentages are up to two decimal points, and rounding may have occurred. Each section includes charts/graphs for:

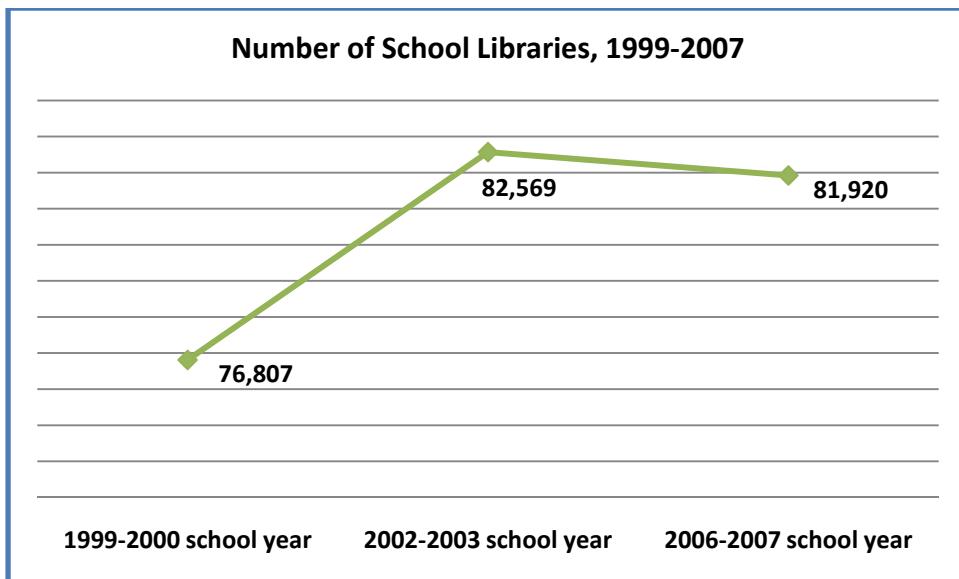
- (1) Numbers of Libraries and Populations Served - Basic metrics about the library environment are presented. This includes the number of library outlets serving schools (K-12).
- (2) Expenditures - Basic metrics about library finance are presented. This includes total operating expenditures and expenditures by type for libraries serving schools (K-12).
- (3) Staffing - Basic metrics about the library workforce are presented. This includes total full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing and detail by position requirement when available for libraries serving schools (K-12).
- (4) Services - In this section basic metrics about the library services are presented. This includes circulation, service use (reference, computer, programs and training/instruction) and visits at libraries serving schools (K-12).

The data presented are compiled from reporting coordinated by the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the ALA-AASL annual survey *School Libraries Count!* Population figures are from the US Census Bureau.

# School Libraries

## Numbers of School Libraries and Students Served

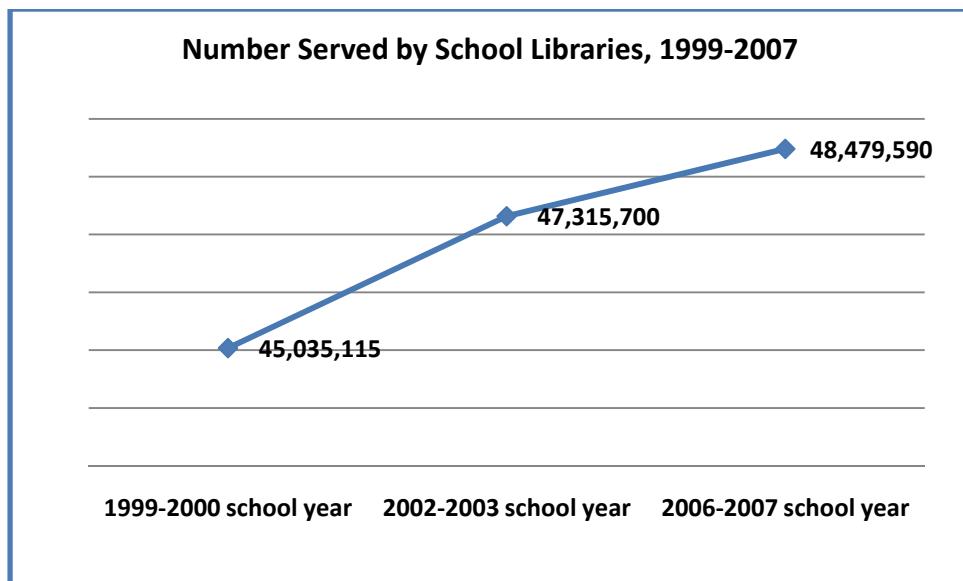
The number of school libraries has changed by about 6 percent from the 1999-2000 and 2006-2007 school years. This increase is a result of population growth and the need for more elementary and secondary public schools, as well as consolidation of smaller schools into larger school districts and the need for additional school libraries to serve students and teachers. The following two line graphs present the number of public school libraries and the numbers of students served between school years 1999-2000 and 2006-2007. Private school libraries are not included in the data presented from the NCES School Library Media Centers surveys, a component of the NCES Schools and Staffing Survey. Private schools are separately surveyed and no longer are asked about the presence of a library.



Sources: National Center for Education Statistics. *School Library Media Centers*, various years (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/getpubcats.asp?sid=041#>), and *Characteristics of Public and Bureau of Indian Education Elementary and Secondary School Library Media Centers in the United States: Results from the 2007-08 Schools and Staffing Survey* (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009322>).

During this same period (2000-2007) the school-age population in the US (ages 5-19 are used for the purposes of comparison) increased from an estimate of 59,592,000 in November 2000 to 61,574,452 in November 2007, about three percent.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> US Census Bureau. Population Estimates. <http://www.census.gov/popest/national/asrh/NC-EST2008-sa.html>



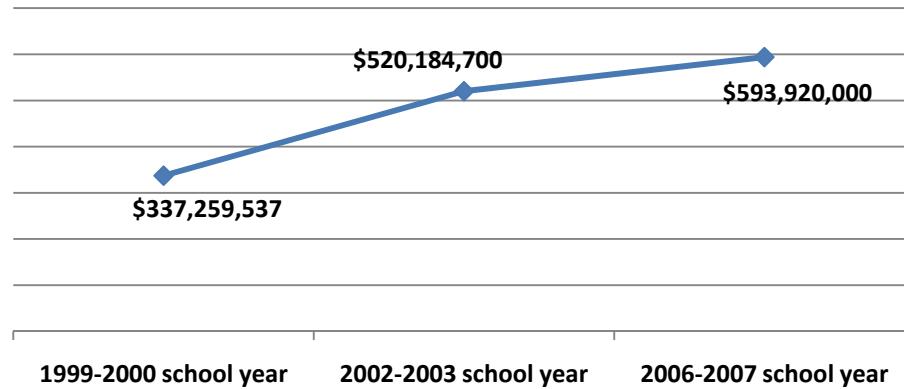
Sources: National Center for Education Statistics. *School Library Media Centers*, various years (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/getpubcats.asp?sid=041#>), and *Characteristics of Public and Bureau of Indian Education Elementary and Secondary School Library Media Centers in the United States: Results from the 2007-08 Schools and Staffing Survey* (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009322>).

## School Library Expenditures

School library operating expenditures are slightly more elusive to measure due to the administrative organization of school library media centers within elementary and secondary education. The following bar graphs present operating expenditures as reported to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the ALA American Association of School Librarians (ALA-AASL).

The percentage change in estimated school library operating expenditures from 1999-2000 to 2002-2003 was 154.2 percent, and increased again between 2002-2003 and 2006-2007 school years by 114.2 percent. These increases in expenditures can be explained partly by the increase in the number of schools during this period due to population growth and school consolidation – the increase in regional school districts.

### School Library Operating Expenditures for Collections, 1999-2007



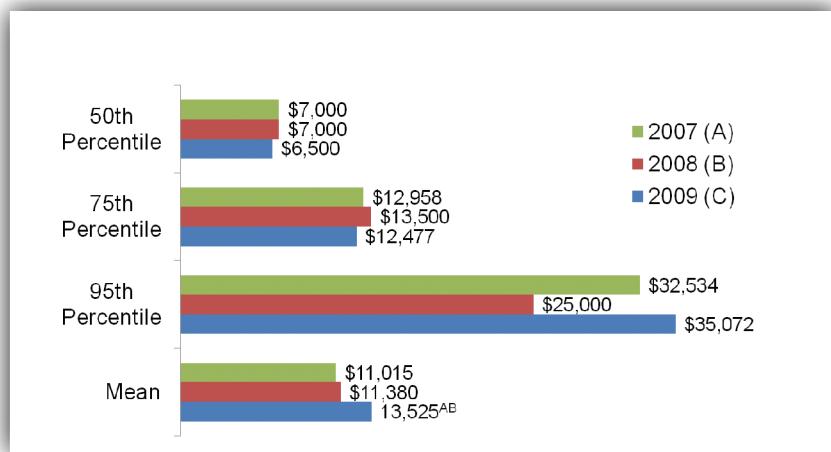
Sources: National Center for Education Statistics. *School Library Media Centers*, various years (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/getpubcats.asp?sid=041#>), and *Characteristics of Public and Bureau of Indian Education Elementary and Secondary School Library Media Centers in the United States: Results from the 2007-08 Schools and Staffing Survey* (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009322>).

"In 2007, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) initiated an annual survey of school library media programs. The development of this longitudinal survey project was mandated by the AASL Board as part of the association's strategic plan with the goal to provide research and statistics to be used at the national, state and local levels when advocating for School Library Media Programs. The survey was developed through the AASL Research & Statistics committee with AASL Board review and final approval."<sup>5</sup>

Respondents to the AASL survey were self-selected. For this reason, it is not possible to generate national totals. Instead, for each statistic, this report presents three percentiles: the 50<sup>th</sup>, the 75<sup>th</sup>, and the 95<sup>th</sup>. The purpose of reporting these three figures is to describe the better half of responding school libraries. The 50<sup>th</sup> percentile, or median, is the figure that divides the respondents in half—half reported this figure or above, half a lower figure. The 75<sup>th</sup> percentile is the figure below which three-quarters of the respondents fall and one-quarter above. Finally, the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile is the figure at or above which only five percent of the respondents fall.

<sup>5</sup> ALA American Association of School Librarians. *School Libraries Count! AASL's national longitudinal survey of School Library Media Programs*, 2009.

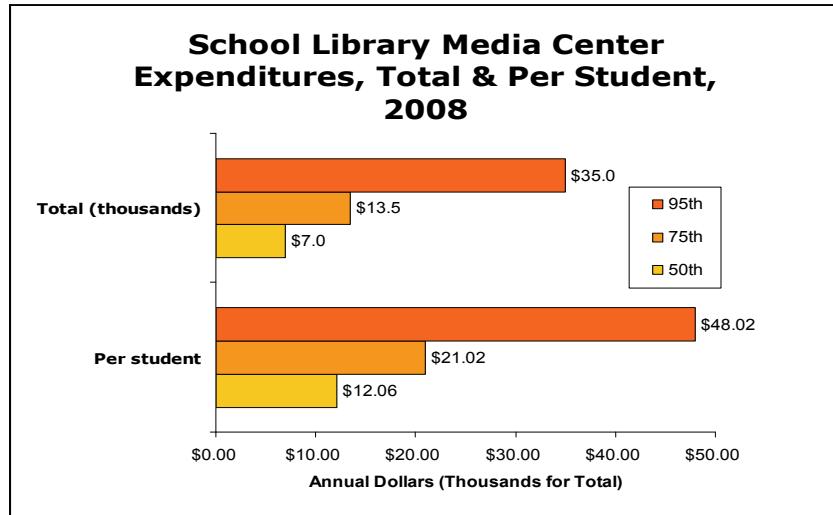
### AASL Average Spent on Information Resources, 2007-2009



- Information resources include print and non-print materials, licensed databases, and other electronic access to information.
- At the 50th percentile, average expenditures fell by \$500, from \$7,000 to \$6,500. There was no change at the elementary school level, but the average annual expenditure was \$1,000 lower in middle and high schools.
- At the 75th percentile, the drop was \$1,023 overall and varied by grade level: \$800 at the elementary school level, \$1,000 for junior high and \$1,418 among high schools.
- And, at the 95th percentile, there were decreases in the average budgets for \$1,000 (elementary schools), \$2,000 (middle schools) and \$2,000 (high schools)

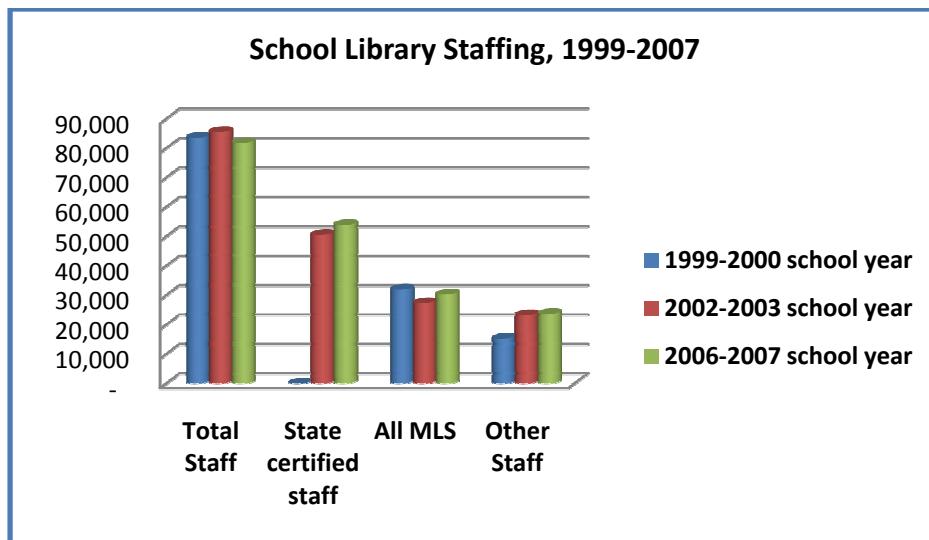
This indicates that almost all schools experienced a decrease in funding for information resources except for a very small percentage of schools that had significant increases over last year. (SLC 2009)

Total 2008 operating expenditures by percentile and percentile expenditures per student are presented in the following graph (SLC 2008). The decline between 2008 and 2009 are highlighted above, but also note the median per student expenditure of just over \$12.00. This is about two-thirds the cost of a fiction title (\$17.26), or about one third the cost of a single non-fiction title (\$27.04). (ALA-AASL, SLC 2008).



## School Library Staffing

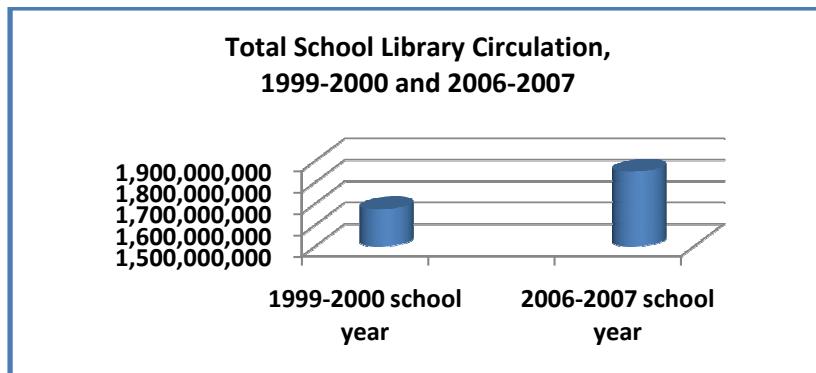
The following bar graph presents the total school library media staff, those with state certification, and those in the MLS and other categories. Beginning in 2002-2003, state certified school library media staff was identified as a separate employee classification and is comprised of staff also counted in the total and those in the MLS and other staff categories.



Sources: National Center for Education Statistics. *School Library Media Centers*, various years (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/getpubcats.asp?sid=041#>), and *Characteristics of Public and Bureau of Indian Education Elementary and Secondary School Library Media Centers in the United States: Results from the 2007-08 Schools and Staffing Survey* (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009322>).

## School Library Services

Circulation of materials in school libraries increased about 9.5 percent from the 1999-2000 to the 2006-2007 school years.

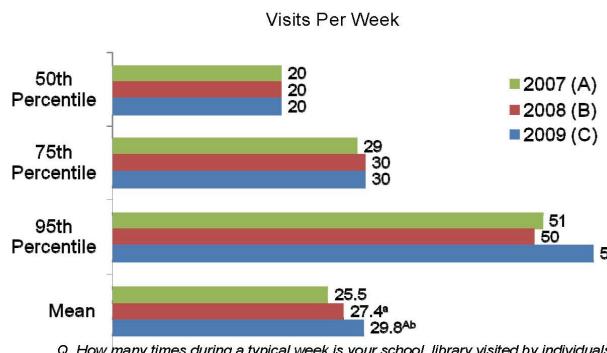


\*Note: These data were not reported in the 2002-2003 study. Sources: National Center for Education Statistics. *School Library Media Centers*, various years (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/getpubcats.asp?sid=041#>), and *Characteristics of Public and Bureau of Indian Education Elementary and Secondary School Library Media Centers in the United States: Results from the 2007-08 Schools and Staffing Survey* (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009322>).

Individual and group visits by students to school libraries in a typical week as reported in the 2008 ALA-AASL survey, *School Libraries Count!*, are reported in the following figure. "Half of responding schools report that at least 20 classes or other groups and 150 individuals visit their SLMCs during a typical week. The top quarter of respondents report at least 30 group and at least 375 individual visits, and the top five percent, at least 50 group and at least 1,000 individual visits."<sup>6</sup>

### Number of Group Visits per Typical Week

(i.e., number of whole classes or smaller groups, NOT the number of individuals in such groups)

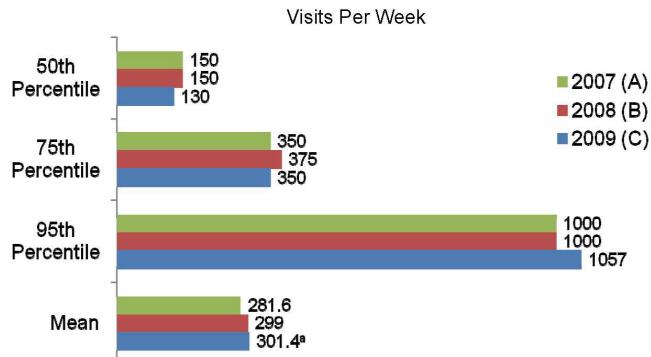


2008 School Libraries Count! ([www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/researchandstatistics/slcsurvey/slcsurvey.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/researchandstatistics/slcsurvey/slcsurvey.cfm))

<sup>6</sup> 2008 School Libraries Count! p.18.  
(<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/researchandstatistics/slcsurvey/SLCreport2008.doc>).

## Number of Individual Visits Per Typical Week

(Only those visiting alone, not those visiting as part of a class or a smaller group)



Q. How many times during a typical week is your school library visited by individuals and groups?

2008 School Libraries Count! ([www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/researchandstatistics/slcsurvey/slcsurvey.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/researchandstatistics/slcsurvey/slcsurvey.cfm))

The 2008 report goes on to describe the significance of enrollment and numbers of library visits. “Unsurprisingly, individual SLMC visits tend to rise steadily with enrollment; but, this factor has a far less dramatic impact on group visits. Half of responding schools with 2,000 or more students report at least 700 individual visits per week, and the top five percent of that group, a minimum of almost 2,750 such visits. By contrast, for all enrollment ranges above 300 students, half of respondents report 20 to 27 group visits per week, though half of those with fewer than 300 students report fewer than 13 such visits. Nonetheless, among the top five percent of each enrollment range, group visits tend to increase consistently with enrollment. Respondents in that group with enrollments of 2,000 or more students report at least 119 group visits per week, while those with fewer than 300 students report a minimum of only 30 such visits.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.