



“Achieving the Library Power goals required collaboration by stakeholders at the district, school, and community levels.”

From Library Power to the Lilead Fellows Program

Creating New Expectations for School Libraries and Librarian Leaders

ANN C. WEEKS

In 1985, the Education Priorities Panel of Interface, a public policy research organization, published *School Libraries . . . No Reading Allowed*, a report describing the deplorable condition and limited collections of New York City Public School libraries, where more than 80 percent of elementary schools had no library program (Education Priorities Panel, 1985).

In 1988, this report came to the attention of the DeWitt Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund, a relatively new foundation funded by *Reader’s Digest* that focused on education and youth, which led to what was known as the National Library Power Project (Library Power).

LIBRARY POWER

Library Power, funded by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund, began in New York City Schools in 1988 and was originally established to create elementary school library programs. Over the following 10 years, the fund expanded to create or improve more than 700 school libraries in 18 additional communities to benefit more than 450,000 children. The goals of Library Power were based on the principles of *Information Power: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (ALA/AECT, 1988). These national school library standards moved from an emphasis on resources and spaces to an emphasis on students and programs (AASL/AECT, 1988) and broadened the mission of the school library to include everyone within the school community.

The Library Power initiative was expected to:

1. Create a new vision with new expectations that encouraged new and innovative uses of the school library’s physical and human resources.

2. Create exemplary models of library media programs integral to the educational process.

3. Strengthen the role of the librarian as a teacher, information specialist, and learning facilitator who assists teachers and students in becoming effective users of ideas and information.

4. Encourage collaboration among teachers, administrators, and librarians that results in significant improvement in the teaching and learning process.

5. Demonstrate the significant contributions that library programs can make to school reform and restructuring efforts.

6. Encourage the creation of partnerships among leaders in school districts, public libraries, community agencies, business communities, academic institutions, and parent groups to improve and support school library programs (Zweizig & Hopkins, 1999).

Over a 10-year period, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund, spending over \$45 million, was the largest private investment in school libraries since the Knapp School Libraries Project of the 1960s. As highlighted in the executive summary of the project, in

participating schools, library collections were created or improved; three-quarters of the schools had facilities that supported individual exploration, small- and large-group teaching, story times, and access to computers; more than 90% of the libraries were staffed by a certified professional; most elementary schools offered flexible access during at least a portion of the week; and approximately half the teachers reported collaborating with a librarian to design a lesson (Wheelock, 1999).

Achieving the Library Power goals required collaboration by stakeholders at the district, school, and community levels. Teams were formed to create a shared vision of what successful students should know and be able to do and then determine how the library program could contribute to this vision. With a sense of urgency, Library Power attempted to develop strategies and make decisions about how to bring about needed changes. While all these changes were important in the Library Power network of communities and schools, little was written about how well the project met its articulated goals.

Among the most important support structures for building collaboration were the annual meetings of project representatives and the informal gatherings of Library Power directors and district library supervisors at American Library Association conferences. During these meetings, stakeholders from across the country were able to come together in “job alike” sessions to share ideas and expertise and engage in group problem-solving. The initiative provided long-term professional development (PD) for district-level administrators to enable them to understand the potential of library programs for



Fig. 1: The Lilead fellows represent 17 states

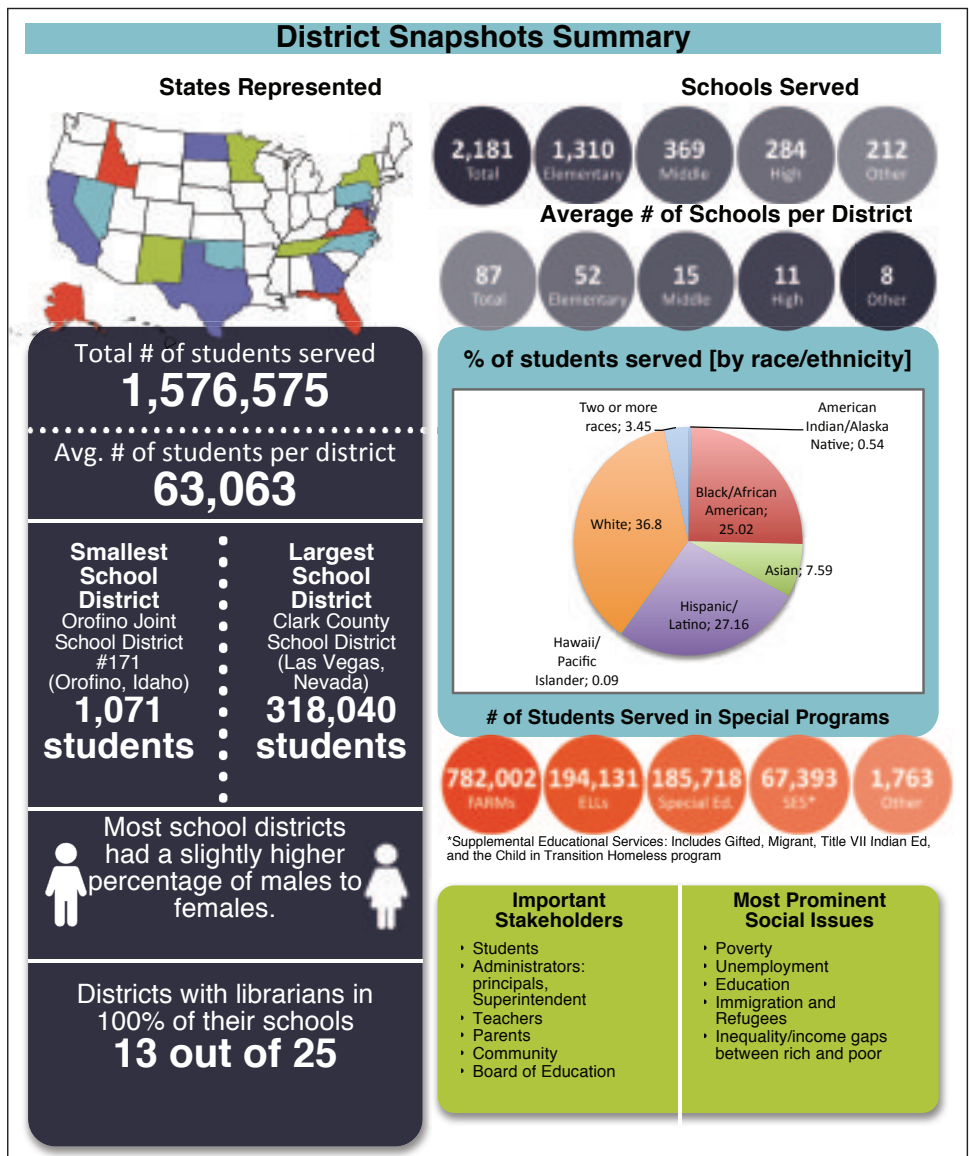


Fig. 2. Lilead Fellows District Summary

improving learning and teaching. As noted by Wheelock (1999), “Across all Library Power sites, [PD] was the

linchpin that held together the core practices.”

Almost 25 years after the creation

of the Library Power project, the Lilead Fellows Program, an initiative developed by a research team at the University of Maryland and funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), benefitted from many of the lessons learned, particularly by the Library Power directors and district library supervisors. The fellows program shares many of the goals articulated from Library Power. The initial cohort of 25 fellows was selected through a competitive application process in fall 2014. Successful applicants represented 17 states (see Figure 1), and their work supported almost 115,000 teachers, 1,800 librarians, and more than 1.5 million students (see Figure 2). The mission of the Lilead Fellows Program emphasizes enabling library supervisors to work with school community members to improve learning and teaching for all children by strengthening school library programs. The program was designed to establish a network of activists and, much like Library Power, Lilead fellows are expected to work collaboratively to create a new vision and new expectations for school libraries that support the educational mission and goals of their districts.

As part of the rigorous application process, each fellow was asked to describe what teaching and learning would look like in his/her district in 2025 and what role the library would play. They were asked to identify issues that their districts were facing and suggest how the library program could contribute to the solutions. Several applicants wanted to work with content-area teachers to implement guided inquiry and project-based learning in their districts. Others described a need to help librarians develop skills to be effective leaders in selecting and using digital resources.

Some wanted their librarians to become leaders in the effective use of technology. By far, the most frequent issue identified was the need for skills to raise expectations of principals and other policy makers related to the role of the librarian in teaching and learning and to demonstrate the value of librarians. Lilead applicants also wanted to strengthen district-transferable leadership and advocacy skills.

Participants were expected to try new approaches to problem-solving, question traditional responses to longstanding issues, be willing to take risks, and be willing to fail. Applicants demonstrated their understanding of these expectations through a self-evaluation that asked them to assess their comfort level with ambiguity, risk-taking, and tolerance for failure. All successful applicants indicated a willingness to risk time and effort to bring about change in their districts, and all indicated that they enjoyed doing things that they'd never done before. Most agreed that their colleagues would describe them as risk takers and that they could learn more from failure than success. The statement that gave applicants the most pause was their level of comfort with ambiguity.

Between January 2015 and June 2016, the Lilead fellows met in face-to-face meetings to build leadership, mentoring, coaching, and activism skills. In addition, they met virtually through monthly webinars and discussions in small groups with mentors (some of whom were Library Power alumnae) to discuss issues they faced in their districts, brainstorm solutions, and contribute to professional learning communities. They were encouraged to identify and address critical challenges and to celebrate small victories. The fellows did not “tinker” by making

only incremental adjustments but rather worked with others to bring about fundamental change in their schools and districts and in the profession. As was true in the Library Power districts, the Lilead fellows collaborated with stakeholders with a sense of urgency about the need to create the library programs that their children deserve.

Some of the changes that the first cohort fellows reported at the culminating meeting in Orlando, Florida, June 2016, were quite remarkable. Working with others in her district, Lynne Oakvik of Broward County (FL) schools has been able to rebrand the library program with a new vision that elevated the visibility of the role of the school librarian in the district's digital vision; thus school librarians have been given specific roles to support personalized learning, and a new learning management system in the district will be implemented in the fall. In her Lilead application, Ann Morgester (personal communication, June 23, 2016) indicated that she wanted to transform Anchorage School District libraries from “book warehouses” into learning centers. She shared her understanding that change begins with a perception about what a library is and what it needs to be: “not about what librarians believe that a ‘proper’ library should be, but rather what the students actually need.” As a result, the libraries in Anchorage are becoming student centered and student driven.

Shari Blohm, from the Prince George's (MD) school district, worked with others to create a new 5-year plan for library services in her district that includes development of a library evaluation system, adoption of makerspaces, a new cooperative project with the public library system, and new literacy goals

that match the county's updated literacy plan. In the San Ramon Valley Unified (CA) district, Kathleen Moore was able to strengthen a collaborative environment in which the library staff and district instructional coaches are recognized as the professional learning team that promotes literacy and justice. In fall of 2014, the Selma Unified (CA) district had no certified teacher librarians. As a result of fellow Maria Petropulos's efforts to educate decision makers regarding the impact of teacher librarians on learning and teaching, every elementary school will now have a full-time librarian, beginning fall 2016, and she expects that every school library will be staffed by fall 2017.

A major difference between Library Power and the Lilead Fellows Program is that the fellows are expected to share their newfound knowledge with others in their districts, colleagues in the field, and educators at all levels. The leadership efforts of the fellows have been demonstrated in numerous ways. They are contributing to blogs, submitting proposals to conferences, writing for professional journals, and making presentations to school boards and community groups. They are offering PD workshops for teachers and administrators, as well as for library personnel. Erin Downey from the Boise (ID) School District is president-elect of the Idaho Library Association. Susan K. S. Grigsby from the Forsyth County (GA) School District serves on the editorial board of *Knowledge Quest* and created a blended learning PD program for noncertified library staff in her district. Stephanie Ham and the library program in the Metro Nashville (TN) Public Schools were featured in *K-12 Blueprint*, an online newsletter published by Intel Education. Fellow Mary Keeling

is chairing the American Association of School Librarians committee responsible for implementing new school library program standards, to be announced fall 2017. The Lilead fellows are creating and communicating new expectations for school library programs that are shared by policy makers, principals, and parents in districts from Alaska to Florida, Virginia to California.

The Lilead fellows are turning up the volume of a revolution started by Library Power. They are creating a new understanding of and vision for school library programs as they develop exemplary models for programs integral to learning and teaching; strengthen collaboration between librarians and classroom teachers, resulting in effective inquiry-based learning; and develop a strong, national voice that articulates how effective school library programs can make a difference in the lives of all members of their communities.

Based on the success of the first Lilead fellows cohort, the project team at the University of Maryland submitted a proposal to IMLS to support a second cohort of fellows and develop an online Lilead Leaders Program. If funding is granted, the Lilead Fellows Program will continue to be an intensive face-to-face and virtual PD program offered to individuals with district-level responsibilities for school library programs and services. The online Lilead Leaders Program, however, will be open to both district- and building-level school personnel who would like to strengthen their skills in leadership and improve teaching and learning. If funded, information about the application process for prospective Lilead fellows and the new Lilead Leaders Project will be available in fall 2016, with successful fellows announced in early 2017. For more infor-

mation about the Lilead Fellows Program, please visit <http://lileadproject.org/the-lilead-fellows-program/>.

REFERENCES

American Association of School Librarians (AASL) & Association of Educational Communication and Technology (AECT). (1988). *Information power: Guidelines for school library media programs*. Chicago: American Library Association.

Education Priorities Panel. (1985). *School libraries. . . No reading allowed*. New York: Vincent Astor Foundation. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. [Q: insert number])

Wheelock, A. (1999). *Findings from the evaluation of the National Library Power Program*. Madison: University of Wisconsin. Retrieved from <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Libraries/Pages/Findings-From-the-National-Library-Power-Program.aspx>

Zweizig, D. L., & Hopkins, D. M. (1999). *Lessons from Library Power: Enriching teaching and learning. Final report of the evaluation of the National Library Power Initiative*. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited.

Ann Carlson Weeks was the executive director of the American Association of School Librarians from 1986 to 1996 and coordinator of the National Library Power Program from 1992 to 1996. She is the director of Professional Education in the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland and director of the Lilead Project.