

# The State of School Libraries in Minnesota

A 2024 Census of K-12 School Libraries

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## Introduction

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In an era where information is both abundant and increasingly complex, school library media centers (LMCs) serve as hubs for learning, creativity, and critical thought. A large body of research shows that well-resourced LMCs, staffed by certified school librarians, are closely linked to improved student achievement, especially among traditionally underserved students (Esad, 2022; Kachel & Lance, 2013; Lance & Kachel, 2018). Yet, little to no data exist describing the state of school LMCs in Minnesota.

National trends indicate a decline in the proportion of schools with dedicated librarians—in Minnesota, there has been a 50% percentage point decline in librarians since the 2009-10 school year (SLIDE, 2024). Many existing positions are part time, with librarians often juggling multiple responsibilities outside of the typical librarian purview, such as substitute teaching, supervising afterschool programs, and providing technology support (International Literacy Association, 2022).

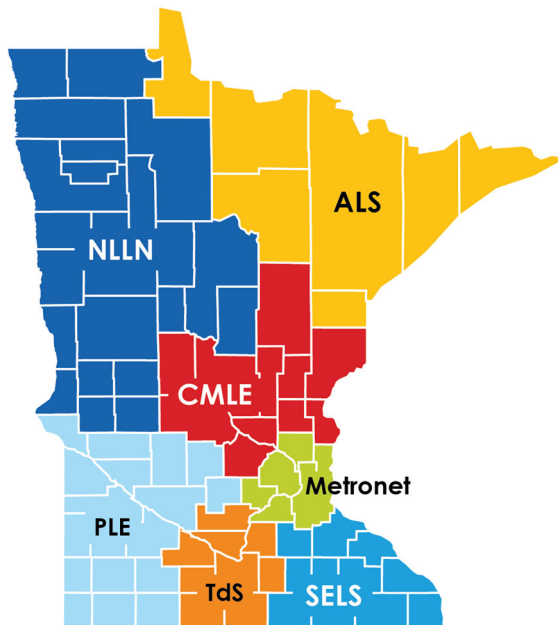
As we navigate the landscape of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, understanding the current state of LMCs is essential for supporting schools to foster environments that promote literacy, critical thinking, and instructional collaboration. According to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), “an effective school library has a certified school librarian at the helm, provides personalized learning environments, and offers equitable access to resources to ensure a well-rounded education for every student” (American Association of School Librarians, 2018a, p.1). In Minnesota, state law mandates that public school libraries be overseen by a licensed media specialist or licensed school librarian (Minnesota Statutes 2023, section 124D.911).

To assist schools, the 2023 Minnesota legislature appropriated funds (direct payments), School Library Aid, to all eligible school districts and charter schools in the state. School Library Aid for a district equals the greater of \$16.11 times the district’s adjusted pupil units for the school year or \$40,000. Aid for a charter school equals the greater of \$16.11 times the charter school’s adjusted pupil units for the school year or \$20,000. The funds could be used to cover infrastructure or staffing costs (Minnesota Statutes 2023, section 124D.992).

Also during the 2023 Minnesota legislative session, Minnesota’s Multicounty Multitype Library Systems (MCMT) received a one-time appropriation to conduct a census of licensed media specialists currently working in Minnesota schools (2023 Minn. Laws 223). The census collected vital data on school library staffing, operations, and



use. The findings from the census provide a variety of invested parties, such as legislators, school administrators, school library staff, and families with information about the support schools and LMC staff need to preserve and strengthen school library programs. The census identifies key staffing, funding, and service gaps that are critical to address in order to ensure students receive the benefits of access to an effective LMC.



Source. <https://sites.google.com/view/mnmultitypelibrarysystems/home>

### What are the Multicounty Multitype Library Systems?

The Minnesota Multicounty Multitype Library Systems (MCMT) work to improve services and facilitate cooperation among the various library types in seven regions across the state:

- Arrowhead Library System (ALS)
- Central Minnesota Libraries Exchange (CMLE)
- Metronet
- Northern Lights Library Network (NLLN)
- Prairielands Library Exchange (PLE)
- Southeast Library System (SELS)
- Traverse des Sioux Library System (TdS)

Wilder Research was contracted by the MCMT in September 2024 to clean, analyze, and report on data previously collected by another vendor during spring 2024. Wilder worked collaboratively with the MCMT to understand prior census administration and data collection, clean the data, and analyze responses from 1,528 K-12 public and

charter schools across Minnesota who responded to the census. A total of 1,777 schools were eligible. See the Appendix for detailed methods.

## Access to library media centers

### Key finding 1: 81% of schools in Minnesota reported that they have a library media center

#### What is a school library media center?

According to state statute, a school library or school library media center must have the following characteristics:

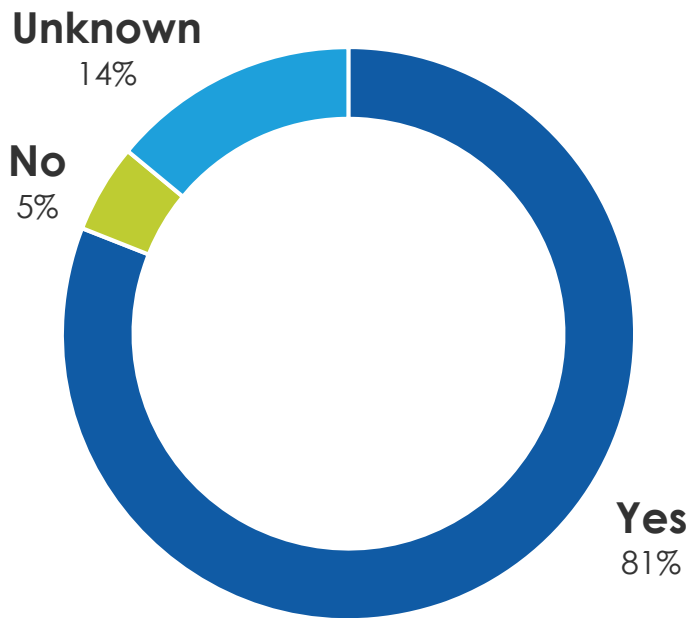
- (1) ensures every student has equitable access to resources and is able to locate, access, and use resources that are organized and cataloged
  - (2) has a collection development plan that includes, but is not limited to, materials selection and deselection, a challenged materials procedure, and an intellectual and academic freedom statement
  - (3) is housed in a central location that provides an environment for expanded learning and supports a variety of student interests
  - (4) has technology and internet access
  - (5) is served by a licensed media specialist or licensed school librarian
- (Minnesota Statutes 2023, section 124D.911)

Note. The census did not provide respondents with this statutory definition of a school library media center. School staff might use these terms without knowledge of this definition or understanding about licensure requirements. Had the census given respondents the statutory definition, fewer schools might have reported having a library media center.

Ideally, every K-12 school has a library media center (LMC). Across Minnesota, approximately 81% of schools reported that they have this resource for their students (Figure 1). Five percent reported that they do not have an LMC. Fourteen percent of schools' LMC status is unknown because they did not respond to the census, did not receive the census, or provided insufficient data. Responses to the census were primarily from librarians and school staff with an LMC at their school. It is less common for charter schools to have an LMC. It is possible that a substantial proportion of the missing 14% of schools are schools without an LMC.



1. **Percentage of schools with a library media center (N=1,777)**



Note. Of schools that responded to the census (N=1,528) versus all eligible schools (N=1,777) as illustrated in the figure, 94% reported that they have an LMC.

Among schools with an LMC, 15% of schools share the LMC with another school (this includes schools that share a building).

Some schools without an LMC find other ways to access library resources: 37% regularly use a nearby public library and 11% use an LMC in a nearby school. More than one-quarter of schools without an LMC (28%) have plans to create an LMC in the next three years.

**Critical Insight #1:**

There is more work to be done to ensure all schools have a library media center. Schools may not have an LMC for many reasons, such as a lack of resources (e.g., budget, space, staffing). However, schools that reported not having an LMC were still eligible to receive School Library Aid.

## Management and staffing of LMCs

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### Key finding 2: Nearly one-half of schools (46%) do not have a licensed media specialist managing the LMC

According to the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), every school should have an LMC that is staffed by a full-time licensed media specialist and full-time support staff (e.g., highly trained technical and clerical support staff) depending on the school's size and needs (AASL, 2018b). In Minnesota, recent state statute (2023) requires school libraries to be served by a licensed media specialist or licensed school librarian. According to census findings, the majority of Minnesota schools do not have adequate staffing to meet these standards/requirements.

#### Pathway to licensure as a media specialist

In Minnesota, a media specialist must hold a K-12 Library Media Specialist license issued by the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board. There are multiple pathways to licensure including completing one of the three approved preparation programs in the state or using alternative pathways such as license via portfolio. A district may also apply for a Tier 1 or 2 license if the requirements are met.

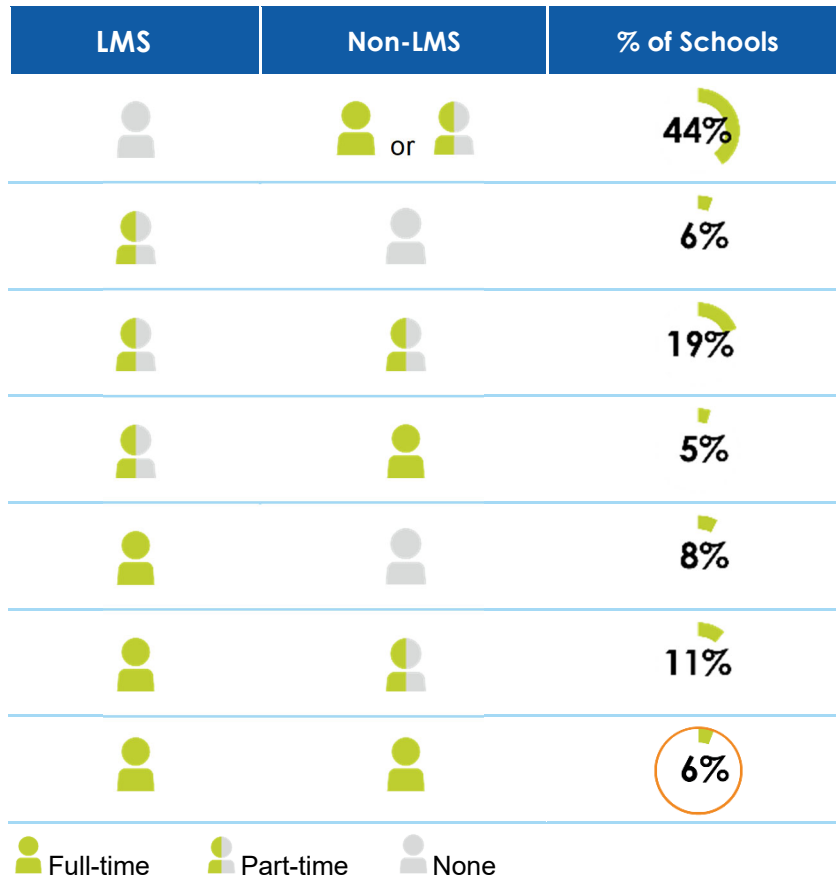
About one-half of schools (54%) reported that they have a licensed media specialist managing the LMC, regardless of hours per week (Figure 2). Many schools that have an LMC managed by a licensed media specialist share that specialist with another school or schools. Note that language in state statute requires the LMCs are *served* by a licensed media specialist, rather than *managed* by one. According to open-ended comments, some schools and districts have someone with a media specialist license managing a large number of schools at once, managing each LMC in name only. If an LMC is not managed by a licensed media specialist, it is most commonly managed by a paraprofessional or a licensed teacher.

An even smaller percentage of schools (24%) have a licensed media specialist that is employed full time in their LMC.

Strictly speaking, only 6% of schools have the level of staffing recommended by AASL.



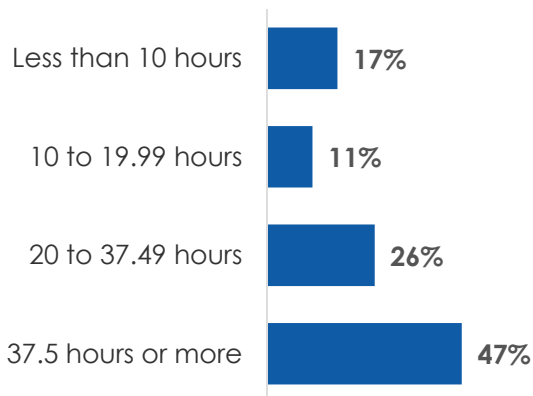
## 2. LMC Staffing (N=1,057)



Note. The remaining 2% of schools reported volunteer or no staff. Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Among schools that reported having a licensed media specialist employed in the LMC, more than half (53%) were staffed at less than 37.5 hours per week (Figure 3).

## 3. LMS hours per week (N=579)



Note. Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

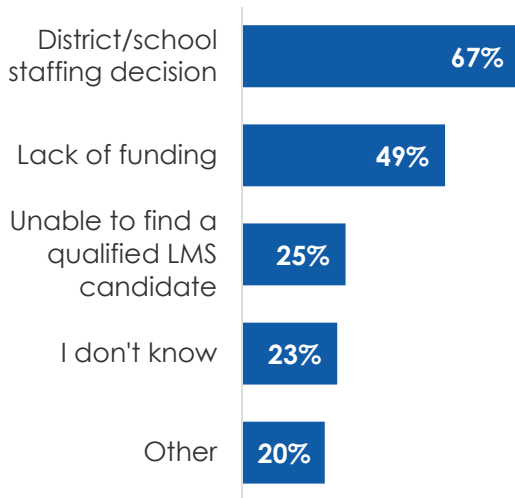


On average, there are enough hours between paid staff, regardless of licensure, to have at least one person in the LMC at all times. The majority of schools have either one (46%) or two (44%) paid staff working in the LMC, regardless of licensure, with a median total of 40 hours per week across all paid staff.

**“Each elementary school in the district should have a 1.0 FTE [full-time equivalent] media specialist, regardless of the number of students in the school. This would give the media specialist time to collaborate with teachers, curriculum directors, and other district personnel to develop a strong curriculum with outcomes tied to state standards. Also, having flexible time to start initiatives for students to increase their time in the library and increase engagement in reading and other activities such as Maker Space or coding.” – Census respondent**

Among schools without a licensed media specialist, the largest proportion reported that the lack of a licensed media specialist was mainly due to a district/school staffing decision and lack of funding (Figure 4).

#### 4. Main reason for lack of licensed media specialist (N=334-346)



Note. Respondents could select all that apply.

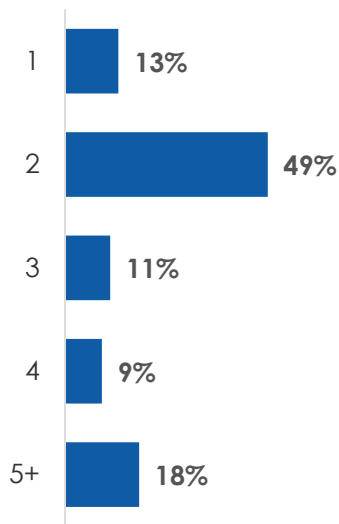
The most common “other” responses were related to having staff already in the process of licensure, the perception that an LMS is unnecessary, and the perceived cost effectiveness of using a more affordable position (e.g., a paraprofessional). In addition, one in four

respondents mentioned that they were unable to find a qualified LMS candidate. This speaks to an inadequate pipeline of LMSs into the school library setting. In addition to funding support, reinforcement and support for an effective LMS pipeline is needed. In open-ended comments respondents shared information about anticipated cuts to school library positions and hours for the coming school year. Continued cuts may contribute to hesitancy among education professionals to pursue the graduate courses needed for licensure.

**Key finding 3: Many licensed media specialists split their time across multiple schools. In Minnesota, a quarter of staff managing LMCs reported that they are working in more than one school.**

Census respondents were asked whether they work in more than one school; 25% responded “yes.” Those who responded “yes” (N=375), were asked how many library media centers they serve. Of the licensed media specialists working in more than one school, 49% work in two LMCs and 38% work in three or more. The number of staff working in multiple schools is concerning given the stated AASL standard of having a full-time LMS in each school (Figure 5).

**5. Proportion of respondents working in more than one school and the number of LMCs they serve (N=372)**



Note. Staff working in more than one school may have reported working in one LMC if the LMC is shared by two or more schools that share a building (e.g., an elementary and middle school).



“For the 2024-25 school year, our district is proposing to have one librarian share the middle school/high school, and one librarian teach at three elementary schools on the prep rotation. The elementary LMS will also be responsible for managing all three library collections with the support of part-time para help in each building. We feel this model is unsustainable at best and disastrous to our library programming at worst.”

**Critical Insight #2:**

School districts should hire licensed media specialists and support staff, support teachers and other staff in seeking licensure, and increase overall staff hours. An effective school library media center is managed by a licensed media specialist. More Minnesota school districts and schools should hire licensed media specialists and protect their time to run the media center. In addition to the need for staff with necessary training (licensure), many LMCs would benefit from additional support staff and overall staff hours.

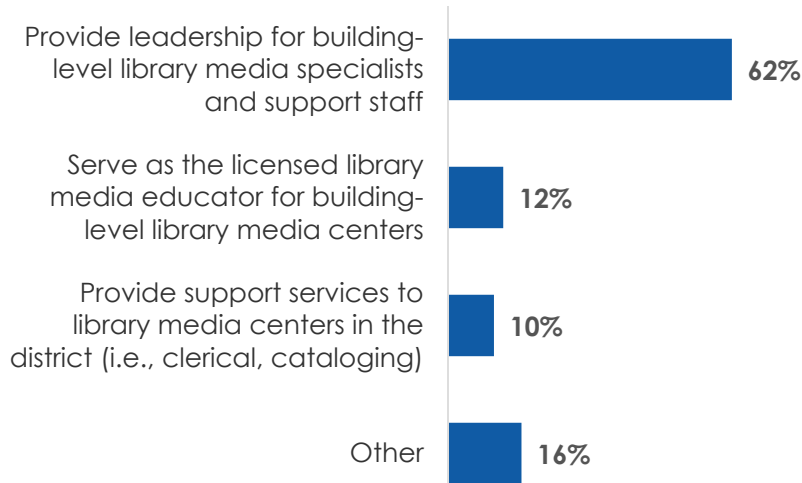
**Key finding 4: Nearly half of schools with LMCs are lacking oversight from district-level staff**

AASL states that a library supervisor at the school district level is critical for student educational success. This role should be positioned at the district level as part of the district-level administration team, and should be someone with a background with libraries or with school library certification. This individual provides supervision and coordination between the district and building-level school libraries. Among schools with an LMC, slightly more than half have some version of this supervision (54%) where district level staff are involved in oversight, operations, or support.

When asked about the primary purpose of district-level staff, the largest proportion reported providing leadership for building-level licensed media specialists and support staff (Figure 6).



## 6. Primary purpose of district-level staff (N=566)



Note. The most common "other" responses included support with budgeting or finances, curriculum, and library programming.

### Critical Insight #3:

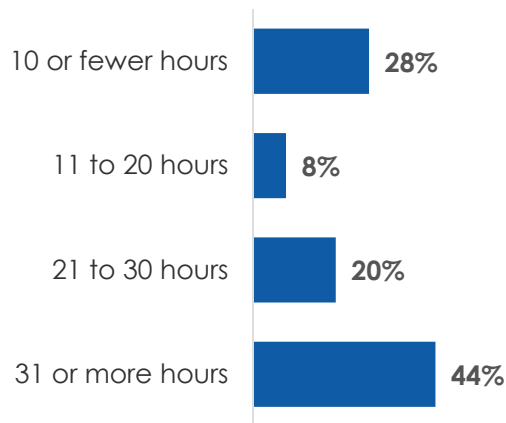
More schools across Minnesota would benefit from district-level staff supporting the work of licensed media specialists. Ideally, district staff play a key role in the effectiveness of a school library. The district-level school library supervisor formulates and administers a district-wide school library vision, advocating for equitable resources and leading the implementation of National School Library Standards. They ensure adherence to policies on intellectual property and digital citizenship; provide professional development; evaluate library effectiveness; promote data-driven dialogue on library impact; and curate diverse, high-quality materials (AASL, 2021).



## Key finding 5: Less than half of LMCs are open most of the school day

Ideally, an LMC is open to students during the entire school day and during before- and after-school hours. The largest proportion of schools (44%) reported that the LMC is open 31 or more hours per week (Figure 7). However, the second largest proportion of schools (28%) reported that the LMC is open 10 hours or fewer per week.

### 7. Number of hours LMC is open each week (N=1,131)



Nearly two-thirds of schools (64%) do not have library services with paid staff available to students before or after school.



## What is the work of LMC staff?

### Key finding 6: On average, LMC staff spend the most time on administrative work and student instruction, and less on collaborating and planning with teachers and professional development of staff

LMC staff have varying responsibilities, particularly considering that many staff managing the LMC are paraprofessionals or teachers. When asked about how they distribute their time, respondents reported the largest proportion of their time is spent doing library-related administrative work (38%) and providing library-related instruction for students (35%; Figure 8). A smaller portion of their time is dedicated to work with other staff and teachers on tasks such as collaboration and planning (7%) or providing professional development (3%).

#### 8. Average proportion of time spent on various tasks (N=1,043)

Task	Proportion of time
Conducting library-related administrative work	38%
Providing library-related instruction for students	35%
Collaborating and planning with teachers	7%
Providing professional development of teachers/staff	3%
Traveling (paid time to travel to other locations)	<1%
Other	17%

Note. Totals do not equal 100%. The proportion of time is reported as the mean of responses to each task.

The most common tasks respondents perform outside of the list provided included technology support, digital/tech integration, device management, clerical tasks, teaching/subbing, supporting other school activities/programs (e.g., study hall, lunch), and other duties as assigned. See illustrative comments from those who spend time on “other” tasks:

**“In addition to being one media specialist for 8 buildings, I lead our digital learning team of teachers (which includes writing curriculum), lead the other certified media specialists, serve as our 6-12 student card public library program**



manager, I am the Destiny Follett [an integrated library management software] program manager, and serve as the elementary tech integrationist.”

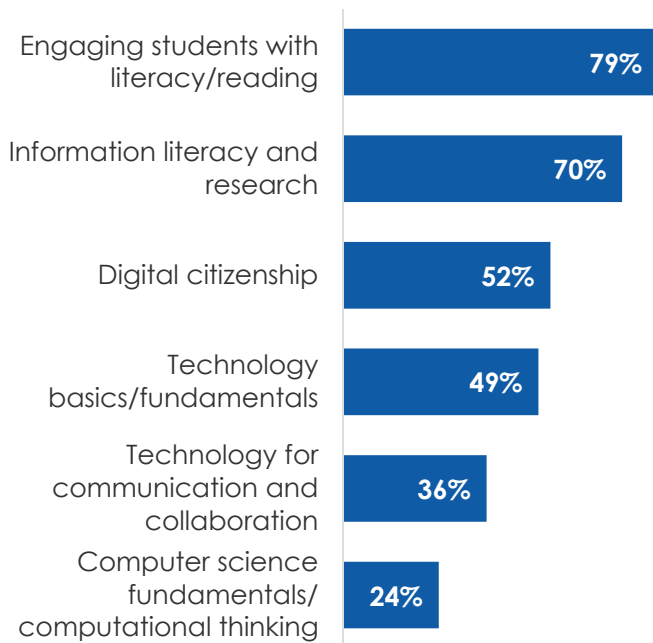
“I am also the robotics coach, the tech assistant coordinator, yearbook and newsletter creator. My "spare" time is spent doing many other things, including non-library administrative things.”

“Other duties as assigned,' including lunchroom supervision, subbing for classroom teachers and specialists, parent 'pick up' at the end of the day, and, this year, co-directing the 5th grade musical.”

### Key finding 7: Library staff most often engage students in literacy/reading, information literacy, and research during student instruction

Over half of library staff report teaching digital citizenship, which includes lessons related to cyber security and cyber bullying. Smaller proportions of respondents teach technology and computer science content.

#### 9. Content taught by respondents who provide student instruction (N=861)



Note. A "none of the above" option was not provided, so it is unknown if respondents wanted to indicate that none of the options apply. Respondents could select all that apply.

AASL recommends that all staff managing an LMC offer student instruction and engage students in literacy and reading, but that is not the case for all Minnesota schools (Figure 9). These numbers may be, in part, due to the lack of LMS staff managing LMCs.

Paraprofessionals and teachers do not have the time, training/ expertise, or responsibility given their role to engage in student instruction around these topics. However, it is also possible that LMSs may not have time to engage in these aspects of their job given time constraints.

#### Critical Insight #4:

Students and teachers will be better equipped for academic and instructional success with the support of a licensed media specialist. It is possible that students who attend a school without an LMS are not receiving beneficial instruction such as reading support, information literacy skills, and support for research projects and digital learning. And teachers have less support for aspects that enhance learning, such as integrating technology into lessons and access to curriculum-aligned materials.





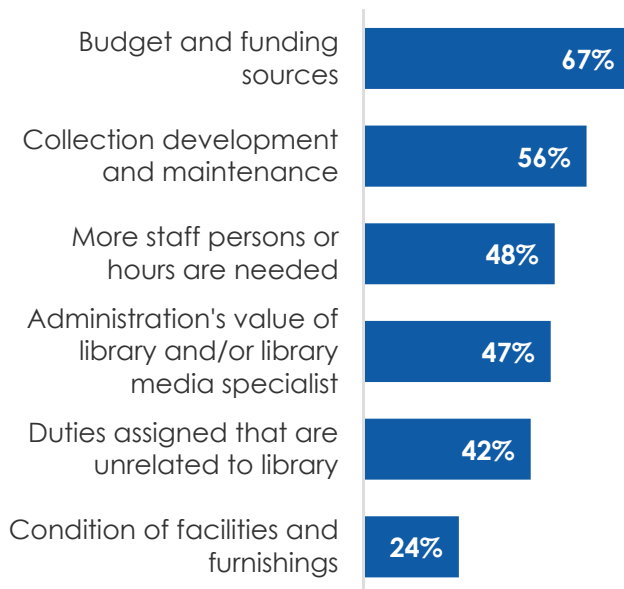
## Greatest challenges and priorities for LMC staff

### Key finding 8: School library budgets and funding sources are the most common challenge identified by LMC staff

When asked to rank the three greatest challenges they face in their job, two-thirds of respondents selected budget and funding sources (67%; Figure 10). Over half mentioned collection development and maintenance (56%) and nearly half cited the need for more staff or hours (48%).



#### 10. Greatest challenges LMC staff face in their job (N=1,061)



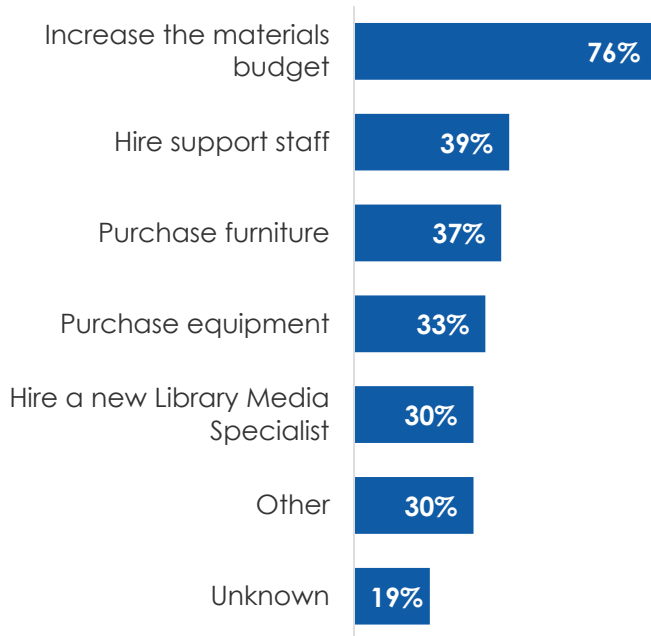
Note. Respondents were asked to rank their top three challenges. This analysis combines responses and reports the percentage of respondents that selected each option as one of their top three.

In addition to selecting top challenges, respondents were invited to share additional comments about what is challenging in their job. The largest proportion reiterated the need for more staff or hours to carry out the duties of their job, noting that they are often pulled into other duties unrelated to the library, and find the library budget inadequate to do their work effectively. Many also noted challenges related to staff positions or hours being cut.

### Key finding 9: Increasing the library materials budget is a top priority for three-quarters of respondents

When asked about their top priorities for improving student access to an effective school library media program, the largest proportion reported the need for an increase in funding for materials (e.g., books, database subscriptions, paid learning/digital programs, digital reference materials).

#### 11. Top priorities for LMC staff to improve student access to an effective school library (N=1,038)



Note. Respondents were asked to select their top priority, their second priority, and their third priority. This analysis combines responses and reports the percentage of respondents that selected each option as one of their three top priorities.

Among those who selected “other,” the most common priorities were related to specific staffing needs: 1) increasing paid hours or full-time employment for staff to complete tasks like weeding, admin time, checking out books, 2) having a full-time licensed media specialist at each school (rather than splitting), and 3) keeping current licensed staff – not cutting staff.

## Status of collections

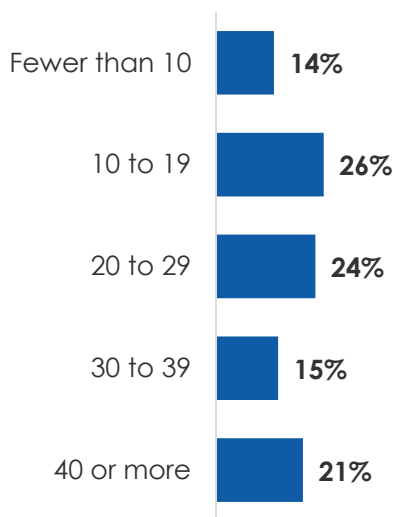
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### Key finding 10: LMC collections are aging, with a median age of 17 years old

The AASL defines an effective school library as having “up-to-date digital and print materials and technology, including curation of openly licensed educational resources” (AASL, 2018a). The median age of collections among schools was 17 years old (2007), though the median publication year of the collection ranged from 1970 for one school to 2020 for another. An outdated school library collection can hinder student access to current, relevant information, impacting their ability to conduct effective research and stay informed about recent developments or events. Additionally, outdated materials may not reflect diverse perspectives or modern pedagogical approaches, potentially limiting the quality of education and inclusivity in the learning environment.

The median collection size across respondents was 11,000 books and approximately 24 books per pupil. However, the number of books per pupil varies greatly across schools. Regardless of the number of books in a school library, it is imperative that collections are curated to maintain relevance, improve access, maximize space, and enhance quality.

#### 12. Number of books per student (N=981)



Aside from physical books, another collection available online to all students is eLibraryMN.org (ELM). ELM gives Minnesota residents of all ages digital access to a range of information, including ebooks, magazines, newspaper and encyclopedia articles, videos, and more. This resource is underutilized, as nearly one-half of respondents reported that students do not receive instruction from building staff on how to use the resources from eLibraryMN.org (47%).

#### Critical Insight #5:

Schools need resources to curate their collections to meet the needs of students and a licensed media specialist to ensure this is done in a way that carries the greatest educational value. Updating school library collections ensures students have access to accurate, current, and diverse materials that support their learning while removing outdated or damaged resources. Staff should instruct students to use ELM, a free resource available to all Minnesota schools.



## Library media center budgets and resources

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### Key finding 11: By and large, districts are the primary decision-makers when it comes to staffing LMCs

Respondents were asked to assign proportional responsibility for who makes decisions on how to staff the library media center and with what positions. Choices included the district, school, and “other.” The largest proportion comes from the district (60%), followed by the school principal (30%). Open-ended comments provided by respondents often indicated that districts make overall funding decisions and school principals decide how to distribute those funds within the school.

### Key finding 12: LMC staff feel under-resourced, with a median LMC budget total of \$5,000 or \$10.99 per student, this includes reported state School Library Aid\*

Across all respondents, schools’ median LMC budget total for the 2023-24 school year was \$5,000 without grants and \$5,322 with grants. That equates to \$10.99 per student without grants and \$11.38 with grants. To put these numbers into context, the average book costs between \$10.15 and \$32.22 depending on the audience (e.g., children, young adult) and type (e.g., paperback, hardcover; fiction, nonfiction) (SLJ Library Staff, 2024). Across schools, budgets ranged from a minimum of \$0 to a maximum of \$66,447. These budget amounts include reported state School Library Aid, although it is possible that some schools received school library aid and census respondents were not aware of it or did not report it in the census.

#### \*Budget calculation details

Budget categories included funding from the district, school, fundraising/PTA/PTO/Book Fair, School Library Aid, and other. “Other” responses most often included funding from grants and donations.

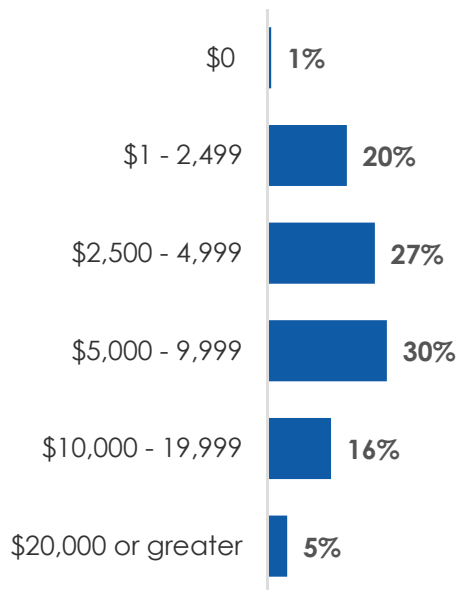
Respondents were asked to exclude budget spent on salaries/benefits, furniture, and printing.

We are unable to report on the distribution of sources of funding due to poor data quality.

It is important to note that purchasing from the LMC budget varies greatly by school and district. The data collected in the census does not adequately capture this nuance and variability.



### 13. LMC budget totals across census respondents (N=974)



Note. Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

Many schools reported grants and donations as additional budget sources, outside of funds coming from the district, school, fundraising/PTA/PTO/Book Fair, and School Library Aid. Some respondents reported using their personal funds to support the library.

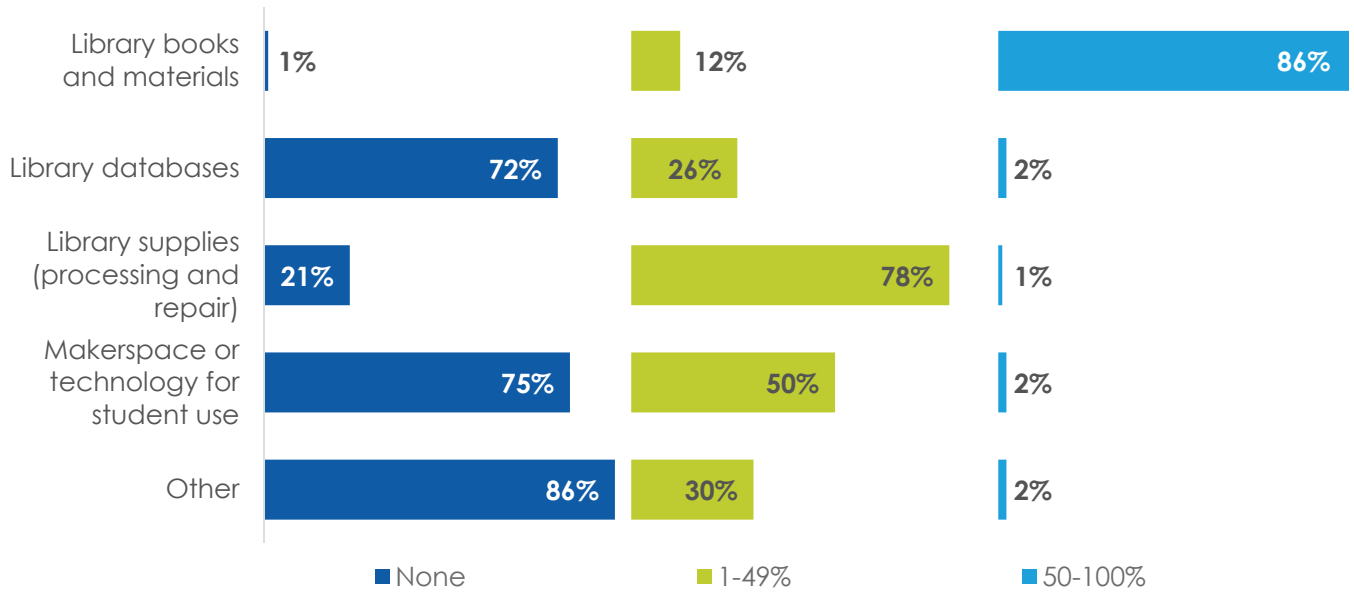
#### Key finding 13: Most schools spend the majority of their LMC budget on books and materials

The vast majority of LMCs spend at least half of their budget on books and materials (86%; Figure 14). Another expense that takes up a smaller share of LMC budgets are library supplies for processing and repair: 78% of LMCs spend something, but less than half of their budget, on this expense. The vast majority of LMCs spend nothing on library databases (72%) or Makerspace\* or technology for student use (75%).

##### \*Makerspace:

In a school setting, a makerspace is a dedicated area where students can explore, design, and create using various tools and technologies. These spaces provide hands-on learning opportunities, encouraging creativity, problem-solving, and collaborative skills through projects involving 3D printing, coding, robotics, and other innovative technologies.

#### 14. Percentage of school LMC budget spent on various categories (N=956)



Note. Percentages do not equal 100% as these are calculated averages of the reported proportion of time spent on various categories. For example, 2% of respondents reported that they spent 50-100% of the LMC budget on library databases.

Budget spent	None	1-49%	50-100%
Library books and materials	1%	12%	86%
Library databases	72%	26%	2%
Library supplies (processing and repair)	21%	78%	1%
Makerspace or technology for student use	75%	50%	2%
Other	86%	30%	2%

## State School Library Aid

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### Key finding 14: All public school districts and charter schools received aid from the state for school libraries in 2023, but the majority of respondents were unaware of aid or impact

#### School Library Aid

Passed during the 2023 Minnesota legislative session, Minnesota Statutes 2023, section 134.356, subdivision 1, states that school districts and charter schools are eligible to receive an automatic distribution of state aid calculated at the greater of \$16.11 per Adjusted Pupil Unit (APU) for the current year, or \$40,000 for school districts and \$20,000 for charter schools. Schools did not need to apply for funding. It was distributed by the Minnesota Department of Education as part of the entire aid package to districts and schools. The funding is ongoing. School Library Aid must be reserved and used for directly funding the costs of the following purposes within a library:

- Salaries and benefits of a school library media specialist
- Electronic, computer, or audiovisual equipment
- Information technology infrastructure or digital tools
- Electronic or material resources
- Furniture, equipment, or supplies

All public school districts and charter schools received School Library Aid, but when asked about their awareness of this funding, 40% of respondents reported that they were unaware of these funds.

Among the 60% who were aware of the funds received, nearly half reported they were unaware of the impact of those funds on the school library (49%).

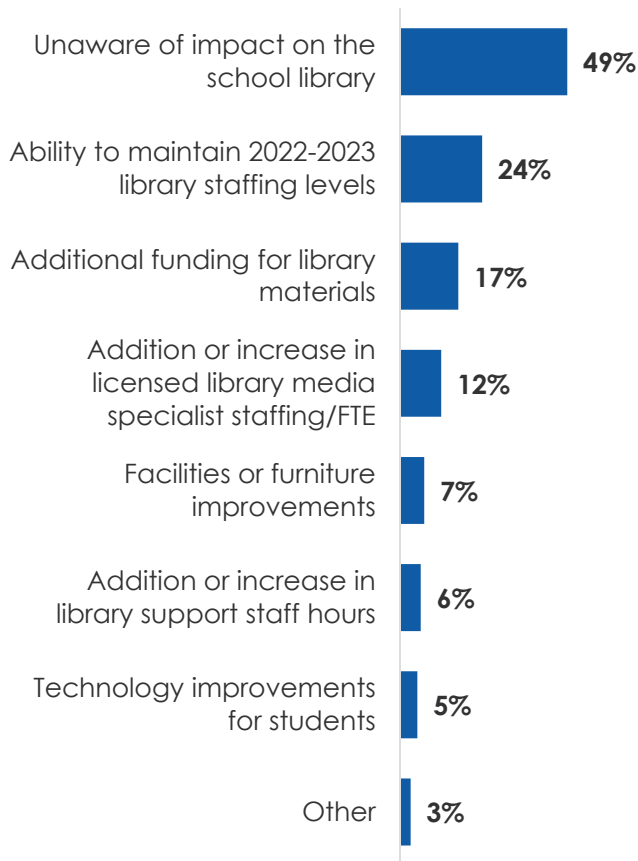
### Key finding 15: School Library Aid was most commonly used to maintain library staffing levels and fund library materials

When asked about how the school library benefited, the largest proportion reported that the funds were used to maintain 2022-2023 library staffing levels, followed closely by funding for library materials (Figure 15). These are self-reports, so it is possible that funding uses were not accurately reported by respondents.





## 15. Use of School Library Aid (N=580)



Note. Respondents could select all that apply. Many respondents did not provide a response to this question. A "don't know" response option was not provided. Analysis excludes respondents who did not provide a response to this question.

In addition to perceived benefits for the school library, respondents were asked about how the funding benefited the district as a whole. Forty-five percent reported that it was used by the district to pay for current positions, 38% reported that they did not know how the district benefited, 11% said the funds were used to create a new position, and 5% selected "other." In an open-ended comment box, a respondent shared their perspective:

**"Legislation: There needs to be more specificity guiding the use of the funds to impact libraries at the building level, especially for any district that already has a library program in their schools. The "new" funds appear to have been pushed into funding existing positions and budgets, ultimately allowing districts to free up money to fund other desired positions outside of library programs."**

### Critical Insight #6:

The Minnesota Department of Education should consider strategies to enforce state statute regarding the definition of a school library, the requirement that LMCs be served by a licensed media specialist, and the use of School Library Aid. Findings call into question whether the 2023 school library legislation is having the intended impact of supporting LMC staffing and infrastructure. LMC staff input into the use of state School Library Aid may help ensure funds address critical needs.



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## Appendix

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### Data preparation and analysis conducted by Wilder Research

Wilder Research was contracted by the Multicounty Multitype Library Systems (MCMT) to clean, analyze, and report on data previously collected by Counting Opinions.

**Collaboration and data cleaning.** Wilder Research worked closely with the MCMT members to clean and analyze the census data. We held weekly meetings to discuss data-related decisions and understand the intent behind each census question. We engaged in extensive data cleaning over the course of three months to enhance data quality and prepare it for analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Our team used available documentation and conducted additional data vetting to verify the census's order and skip patterns, and to identify problematic responses. For closed-ended questions with a write-in option, the team first coded open-ended responses into existing census response options, when appropriate, and created thematic codes for remaining responses.

**Data preparation and analysis.** The dataset was uploaded into SPSS for analysis once data cleaning and additional coding of “other” responses was complete. This included calculating frequencies and conducting select cross-tabulations to derive meaningful insights from the data.

By focusing on thorough data cleaning and structured analysis, Wilder Research worked to improve the integrity and reliability of the census findings.

### Census development, recruitment, and administration conducted by previous vendor

The following sections summarize information provided to Wilder Research by the MCMT. For questions about census development, recruitment and administration, please contact the MCMT.

Data for the census was collected via a data collection tool developed and administered by a previous vendor. The MCMT collaborated with the previous vendor to develop census questions aimed at assessing the current status of licensed media specialists and school libraries across the state. An advisory group guided census development and administration. This group consisted of 14 members, including licensed media specialists from various regions, university faculty, and the MCMT



executive directors. Many advisory group members had also participated in the School Library Data Team, organized by State Library Services, which conducted a school libraries survey in fall 2023. That survey was done to identify which schools currently had a library, the contact person for the program, and their job title.

## Sampling

During the 2023-24 school year, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) issued school library aid to all K-12 public and charter schools. The aid was intended to provide direct funds to improve school library media programs. To create a complete sample list of schools that received funds, the MCMT staff worked closely with MDE to understand which types of schools received school library aid. Criteria for inclusion in the census included several school types, following definitions provided by MDE. Figure 16 lists the included school and organization classification codes and types.

### 16. School types eligible to participate in the census

MDE School Classification Code	School Classification Type
10	Elementary Schools (Grades PK-6)
20	Middle Schools (Grades 5-8)
31	Junior High Schools (Grades 7-8 or 8-9)
32	Senior High Schools (Grades 9-12)
33	Secondary Schools (Grades 7-12)
46	Organization-run Online Learning Programs (Comprehensive and/or State-Approved Supplemental)
MDE Organization Code	Organization Type
1	Independent District and Schools
3	Special Districts and Schools (includes only Minneapolis Public Schools and South St. Paul Public Schools)
7	Charter Schools

Note. The sample excluded pre-K/early childhood programs, online programs that were on pause or removed as a program by MDE, and any programs that closed during the 2023-24 school year.

The initial sample list was based on data collected via the fall 2023 survey conducted by MDE State Library Services. This contact information was used as a starting point to identify the schools to



receive the census. If the school contact information was outdated or missing from the list, MCMT staff used their membership directory lists or school principals' contact information instead. In total, 1,674 schools were sent the census.

Wilder Research identified an additional 103 schools that should have received a census, including schools that did not receive it or no evidence exists to show that they received the census. In total, 1,777 schools were eligible to complete the census.

## Recruitment and census administration

Schools were invited via email on April 1, 2024, to participate in an online census targeted at media specialists or staff involved in library media centers. State Senator Mary Kunesh encouraged participation through a recorded video included in the invitation. Automated reminder emails and phone calls were sent biweekly to non-responding schools, and MCMT staff also followed up individually with schools. The deadline for census completion was May 22, 2024. Some schools were contacted post-census for further clarifications if needed.

## Census content and format

The census was accessed using an online platform and included 65 questions. Questions included both closed- and open-ended questions with several opportunities for open comments. Topics covered in the census included: background information, general library media center information, duties/responsibilities, challenges and priorities, students served, operational budget overview, and school library aid information. For information about the full census, contact the Multicounty Multitype Library Systems.

## Limitations

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Several challenges throughout the census project hindered MCMT and Wilder's overall confidence in the validity and reliability of the data collected. Wilder Research employed several strategies to mitigate data concerns (e.g., removing data that were clearly inaccurate, re-coding based on open-ended comments provided). Apparent data inaccuracies were largely the result of census design and administration prior to Wilder's involvement. Wilder Research identified three primary challenges during data cleaning and analysis:

1) Unknowns about the original sample and inability to understand the true response rate



2) Potential inaccuracies due to census design

3) The need for extensive data cleaning (e.g., due to misinterpretation of the question, instructions)

Due to some of the apparent varied interpretations of the census questions or limited respondent knowledge, it is possible that some census responses are inaccurate without our knowledge, particularly related to LMC budgets. In addition, the length and complexity of the census may have contributed to a high drop-off rate as the census went on. This is apparent from the decrease in responses toward the end of the census. It is also likely that response bias may be influencing the count of how many Minnesota schools have an LMC, as it is likely that schools that did not respond were more likely to not have an LMC. It is also possible that responses from non-LMC staff and teachers (e.g., paraprofessionals) may have been influenced by fear of losing their job, given that state statute requires LMCs to be managed by someone with specific licensure. Future censuses should include a pilot testing period to ensure the gathering of valid and reliable data.

Despite these limitations, it is worth noting that a large number of schools responded to the census, providing good representation of schools across Minnesota.

## About the census respondents

Of the 1,777 schools that were eligible to participate, 1,528 responded to the census. Charter schools make up a smaller share of respondents compared to respondents from independent and special district public schools (Figure 17). Over half of respondents represent elementary schools (58%), followed by middle schools (15%). A smaller proportion of respondents represent senior high (13%) and secondary schools (13%). Over half of respondents are from schools in greater Minnesota, compared to a slightly smaller proportion from the Twin Cities 7-county metro. Respondents represented each of the MCMT systems, with the largest number of respondents from the Metronet library region, which serves the Twin Cities 7-county metro; the smallest number of respondents came from the Traverse des Sioux Regional Library System (TdS), which serves counties in south central Minnesota.





## 17. Characteristics of participating schools (N=1,528)

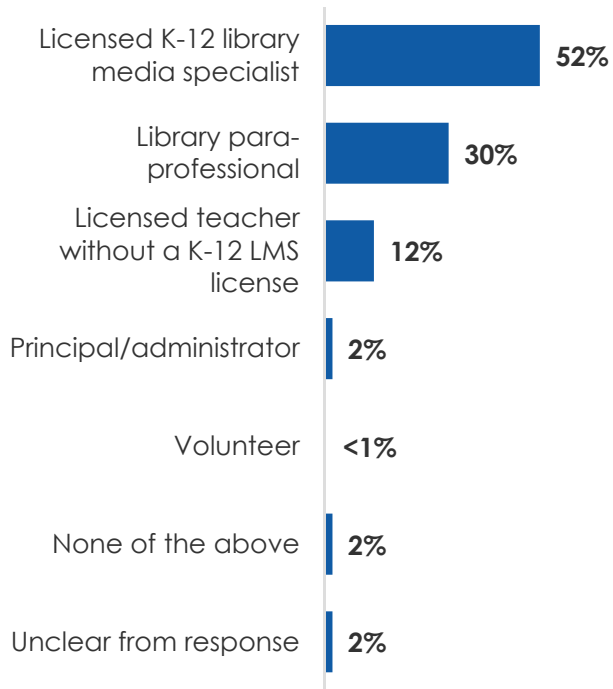
Categories	Census respondents	
	#	%
<b>School type</b>		
Independent District and Schools and Special Districts and Schools (includes only Minneapolis Public Schools and South St. Paul Public Schools)	1,336	87%
Charter Schools	192	13%
<b>School classification</b>		
Elementary Schools (Grades PK-6)	885	58%
Middle Schools (Grades 5-8)	221	15%
Junior High Schools (Grades 7-8 or 8-9)	13	1%
Senior High Schools (Grades 9-12)	205	13%
Secondary Schools (Grades 7-12)	204	13%
Organization-run online learning programs (Comprehensive and/or State-Approved Supplemental)	0	0%
<b>Region</b>		
Twin Cities 7-county metro	669	44%
Greater Minnesota	859	56%
<b>Population size</b>		
Urban centers (district population 50,000 or greater)	576	38%
Urban (district population 2,500-49,999)	835	54%
Rural (district population less than 2,500)	117	8%
<b>MCMT Library System</b>		
Arrowhead Library System (ALS)	100	7%
Central Minnesota Libraries Exchange (CMLE)	178	12%
Metronet	670	44%
Northern Lights Library Network (NLLN)	206	13%
Prairielands Library Exchange (PLE)	132	9%
Southeast Library System (SELS)	158	10%
Traverse des Sioux Library System (TdS)	84	5%

Note. The Twin Cities 7-county metro includes Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington counties.

Census respondents were largely licensed media specialists or library paraprofessionals. Some respondents completed responses for several schools (e.g., if they were managing LMCs at multiple schools; Figure 18).



## 18. Role of census respondent (N=1,170)



Note. Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding.

## Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Minnesota State Senator Mary Kunesh for advocating for the appropriation of legislative funds to conduct this census to begin to build an understanding of school libraries in the state in order to better support them. Senator Kunesh also showed her support for school libraries in Minnesota by advocating for the appropriation that provides direct aid for school library programs.

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to the MCMT team for their invaluable contributions to this project. We appreciate the time and effort invested by Ashley Dress, Bethany Kauffman, Stacey Lunsford, Julie Reimer, and Ann Walker Smalley, and for their meticulous attention to detail and unwavering commitment to this study. The MCMT team would also like to thank the members of the advisory committee for their contributions to the census design.

This census would not have been possible without the significant time and effort dedicated by school staff who completed the census. Your insights are crucial for understanding the state of school libraries in Minnesota.

The following staff from Wilder Research made significant contributions to this project:

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Maureen McGovern  
Stephanie Nelson-Dusek  
Kerry Walsh

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