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Teacher-Librarians in B.C.: Working and Learning Conditions Surveys, 1982-1995

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Introduction

The [British Columbia Teacher-Librarians' Association](#) (BCTLA) has conducted annual Working and Learning Conditions Surveys since 1982. This report compiles and analyses the results of those surveys, which were originally published each year in the BCTLA's journal, *The Bookmark*, normally in the spring.

BCTLA President [Gerald Soon](#) compiled the data in fall 1996 to provide baseline information for the Staffing and Class Size Review Committee (SCSRC). The SCSRC--a tripartite committee arising from the first provincial collective agreement signed between the BCTF and the B.C. Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) in 1996--included members from BCTF, BCPSEA, and the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training. Part of the committee's mandate included examining non-enrolling teacher staffing.

Since the second year of the survey, BCTLA chapter councilors have been asked to report the staffing figures for teacher-librarians using the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{number of teacher-librarians}}{\text{number of students}} \times 1000 = \text{Teacher-Librarians per 1000 students}$$

This information is collected at both the elementary and secondary levels. The results are summarized in [Appendix A \(elementary\)](#) and [Appendix B \(secondary\)](#). A similar ratio is determined for clerical staffing.

An analysis of the data shows that:

- the number of teacher-librarians in British Columbia, expressed as full-time-equivalent (FTE) per 1000 students, is lower now than it was in 1983-84 at both the elementary and secondary levels;
- the ratio of teacher-librarians to students is lower now than it was in 1988-89 at both the elementary and secondary levels;
- many teacher-librarians at the elementary level provide preparation time for colleagues within their assigned time;
- in districts with site-based management or school-based management, there has been an erosion of teacher-librarian staffing over time; and
- teacher-librarians are being replaced by clerical staff in certain districts.

What Teacher-Librarians Offer Schools, Students, and Teachers

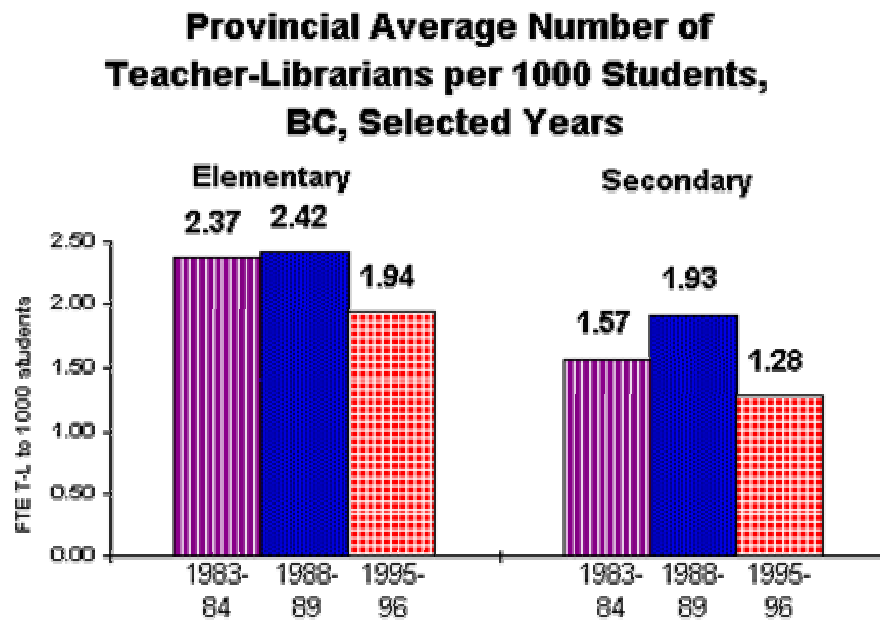
Teacher-librarians are information specialists with a commitment to the entire school instructional team who:

- support the three Principles of Learning underlying the Ministry's Integrated Resource Packages:
 - learning requires the active participation of the student
 - people learn in a variety of ways and at different rates
 - learning is both an individual and a group process
- help reach students with various learning styles through their expertise in resource-based learning experiences
- allow and encourage students to explore their own special interests
- support the total school curriculum as a collaborative partner in curriculum planning and instruction
- bring expertise in how to integrate information skills within co-operatively planned units of instruction

- offer involvement with curriculum development by:
 - identifying teaching and learning strategies;
 - working with teachers and students in the selection, production, and evaluation of learning resources; and
 - serving as a consultant in planning effective learning activities
- manage, acquire, and develop a collection of current, up-to-date resources housed in a shared environment
- offer familiarity and expertise with technological change (e.g., CD-ROMs, Internet)
- promote the effective use of learning resources
- provide reference services
- advocate for lifelong literacy
- promote appreciation of literature
- offer opportunities for students to explore and use many information sources.

Staffing Fluctuations

The following chart demonstrates that the provincial average ratios of teacher-librarians to students are lower now than they were in 1983-84, at both the elementary and secondary levels [\(1\)](#). Perhaps in part because of teacher-librarians' advocacy campaigns, staffing levels improved slightly in 1988-89, but these gains have since been reversed.



The majority of reporting school districts have experienced a decrease in staffing at both the elementary and secondary levels since 1983-84. At the elementary level, 31 school districts have fewer FTE teacher-librarian positions now, while 10 districts have more. At the secondary level, 31 school districts have fewer FTE teacher-librarian positions while only 6 districts have more. Increases have been as low as 0.02 FTE while decreases have been as large as 3.0 FTE. [\(2\)](#)

Staffing Levels and Preparation Time

There is a general difference between staffing levels at the elementary level and the secondary level, and the two should not be compared directly for several reasons. First, enrolments at individual elementary schools tend to be much lower, resulting in a higher district-wide average. Exceptions to this rule tend to

be those districts where the staffing level is lower and teacher-librarians are assigned to more than one school. Second, many elementary teacher-librarians must provide preparation time for their colleagues. Last year, 73% of responding school districts assigned elementary teacher-librarians to provide preparation time while only 7% assigned secondary teacher-librarians to provide preparation time.

The use of the teacher-librarian to provide preparation time is illustrated by the 1984-85 survey, which showed that 205 elementary teacher-librarians provided 1,549 elementary teachers with 58,734 minutes of preparation time per week. This worked out to an average of 37 minutes per week to an average of 7.5 teachers.

In 1989, the survey analysis noted that most teacher-librarians in Kamloops were spending 80% of their time with scheduled classes.

The 1992 survey determined that 28% of elementary teacher-librarians were providing preparation time for their classroom colleagues, compared to 4.3% of secondary teacher-librarians. These demands to provide preparation time came in a year when 169 elementary and 39 secondary teacher-librarians experienced cuts in their library time. The situation had deteriorated even more by last year, when 485 elementary teacher-librarians reported cuts to their library time over the previous year.

There is a great deal of variability in the amount of preparation time teacher-librarians provide at the school level. Table 1 displays a range of 5% to 100% of preparation time provided for a selection of elementary schools in last year's survey.

Table 1: Percentage of Preparation Time Provided by Teacher-Librarians, Selected Elementary Schools, 1995-96

| School District | T-L time (FTE) | % Prep Provided |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Alberni (Ucluelet Elem.) | 0.6 | 40% |
| Cariboo-Chilcotin (Buffalo Creek) | 0.4 | 50% |
| Chilliwack (Cultus Lake Elem.) | 0.56 | 31% |
| Coquitlam (Mt. Meadows Elem.) | 0.6 | 86% |
| Delta (Jarvis Elem.) | 0.80 | 20% |
| Fernie (C.L. Salvador Elem.) | 0.4 | 100% |
| Golden (Lady Grey Elem.) | 0.75 | 26% |
| Howe Sound (Brackendale Elem.) | 0.84 | 14% |
| Kitimat (Alexander Elem.) | 0.50 | 18% |
| Maple Ridge (Riverside Elem.) | 1.00 | 40% |
| Mission (Cherry Hill Elem.) | 1.00 | 80% |
| Nanaimo-Ladysmith (Pleasant Valley) | 0.45 | 50% |
| Nechako (David Hoy Elem.) | 0.5 | 28% |
| Nelson (A.I. Collinson Elem.) | 0.4 | 20% |
| North Vancouver (Seymour Heights) | 0.8 | 5% |
| Peace River North (Charlie Lake) | 1.0 | 40% |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|------|-------|
| Penticton (Snowdon Elem.) | 0.9 | 48% |
| Powell River (Edgehill Elem.) | 0.2 | 56% |
| Prince George (Buckhorn Elem.) | 0.4 | 20% |
| Quesnel (Barlow Creek) | 0.47 | 43% |
| Shuswap (Bastion Elem.) | 0.7 | 10.6% |
| Sooke (Sooke Elem.) | 0.05 | 95% |
| South Cariboo (Ashcroft Elem.) | 0.75 | 45% |
| Surrey (Beaver Creek Elem.) | 0.6 | 47% |
| Vernon (Kidston Elem.) | 0.6 | 80% |
| Windermere (Radium Elem.) | 0.1 | 100% |

Site-Based Management and Staffing Levels

Langley School District has had site-based management for some time; although teachers were assured when the management system was brought in that staffing levels would not be affected, there has been a decline in staffing over the years. In 1983-84, the elementary FTE for Langley was 2.26. Although there were slight gains in three years, the staffing level dropped in each of seven years to the 1995-96 level of 0.945 FTE. Furthermore, Langley has a number of relatively new schools that have never had a teacher-librarian since the administrative officers decided to staff the schools' libraries with clerical staff instead.

In Maple Ridge, another district with site-based management, the elementary FTE was 2.72 in 1983-84. By 1995-96, the elementary FTE had declined to 1.44.

Clerical Time and Erosion of Teacher-Librarian FTE

The initial objective of collecting data on clerical time was to determine whether B.C. school library resource centres were meeting the BCTF standards for clerical assistance.[\(3\)](#)

Last year's survey indicates a disturbing trend away from the original use of clerical support to provide assistance to teacher-librarians towards clerical positions being used to run school libraries, with minimal or no teacher-librarian presence. Some examples from last year's survey are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Clerical Time Replacing Teacher-Librarians, 1995-96

| School District | Clerical time (FTE) | Teacher-Librarian time (FTE) |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Arrow Lakes (south zone schools) | 0.35 | 0.0 |
| Greater Victoria (3 schools) | 0.85 | 0.0 |
| Langley (2 schools) | 1.0 | 0.0 |
| Powell River (2 schools) | 1.0 | 0.2 |
| Saanich (1 school) | 0.6 | 0.16 |
| Sooke (most schools) | 0.23 | most 0.1 or less |
| South Cariboo (1 school) | 0.85 | 0.0 |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|------|-----|
| Cariboo-Chilcotin (1 secondary) | 0.70 | 0.0 |
|---------------------------------|------|-----|

Facts about clerical time:

- Greater Victoria cut elementary teacher-librarian positions a number of years ago.
- In Powell River, teacher-librarian staffing has suffered massive cuts: in 1994-95, the ratio declined from 1.78 FTE to 0.7 FTE.
 - Six of seven Powell River elementary schools have on average 0.2 FTE teacher-librarians.
 - Two schools have a full-time clerical person.
 - One has a 0.95 FTE clerk.
 - Two have clerical FTE of 0.7 or less.
- All elementary schools in Sooke have 0.1 or less FTE teacher-librarians.
 - Three schools report no teacher-librarian at all.
 - The district has 0.23 FTE clerical time for each school.
- In Langley under site-based management, only two out of 33 schools have a full-time teacher-librarian position.
 - Two schools have no teacher-librarian at all, but have a full-time clerk in the library.
 - Most other elementary schools have part-time allocations, with the majority of time used to provide preparation time.
- Secondary schools have not generally experienced the cuts seen at the elementary levels, but there are examples such as Cariboo-Chilcotin, where the secondary school library resource centre is staffed by a clerical position, with no teacher-librarian assigned to the school.
 - The nature of secondary timetables accounts for much of the difference; contractually teachers must be provided with preparation time that is unassigned time.

Conclusions

- The overall staffing level for teacher-librarians has decreased over the years. School districts have seen non-enrolling, non-protected teachers as the solution to their budgeting and funding problems. Few collective agreements have teacher-librarian clauses.
- Preparation time provision at the elementary level has a profound effect on the type and quality of library education service that is being provided to our students.
- Site-based management has had a profound effect on staffing levels in school districts that have adopted this method of accounting, especially where staffing levels are not district-directed.
- Finally, whereas the BCTLA used to monitor clerical staffing to see whether BCTF standards were being met, the BCTLA now monitors clerical staffing to determine whether clerical staff are replacing teacher-librarians.

The time has come to look at the overall status of teacher-librarians and school library resource centres in British Columbia.

(1) 1983-84 was chosen as the base year because of improved participation in the survey. Results given here may differ slightly from those published in the BCTLA's journal, *The Bookmark*, as all data are included, including some that may have arrived after publication. [Return](#)

(2) Increases range from 0.02 to 1.68 FTE (elementary) and 0.12 to 0.8 (secondary); decreases range from 0.14 to 1.92 (elementary) and 0.1 to 3.0 (secondary). [Return](#)

(3) The BCTF minimum criteria for clerical staffing in library resource centres are:

| Students | Library Assistants/Technicians (FTE) |
|-----------------|---|
| 200 or fewer | 0.5 |
| 201-400 | 1.0 |
| 401-750 | 1.5 |
| 751-1000 | 2.0 |
| Over 1000 | 2.5 |

Plus 0.5 library assistant for each full 400 students above 100.

Source: *The Bookmark* (March 1996), p. 43. [Return](#)

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