

“THE PRODUCERS” and “THE CHEERLEADERS”
or
LIBRARY DATA FOR PUBLIC POLICY USE?

Keynote Talk at the 2001 FSCS Professional Development Conference
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Before talking about library data for public policy use, I want to quote briefly from an ALA report issued nearly twenty years ago. It was ALA’s response to ***A Nation at Risk***ⁱ, a report on the crisis in education during the period of the Reagan Administration. Secretary of Education Terrence Bell commissioned that report and the press gave it much attention. It is a powerfully written document, but it failed to comment on library roles in addressing the crisis. As you might expect, that fact generated considerable dismay in library circles. Brooke E. Sheldon, then ALA president, appointed a task force of nine people to prepare ALA’s responseⁱⁱ.

I chaired the task force. We titled our report ***Realities of Education Reform in a Learning Society***ⁱⁱⁱ. We presented brief statements on four realities that the authors of ***A Nation at Risk*** seemed to have missed. These were:

- Learning begins before schooling
- Good schools need good libraries
- People in a learning society need libraries
- Public support of libraries is an investment in people and in communities.

We also made six recommendations. The fourth was:

- Federal responsibilities for library statistical data and planning information must be assumed by the National Center for Education Statistics in cooperation with the state library agencies, state departments of education, and national organizations.

In the course of developing that recommendation, we looked at the then-current status of published and yet-to-published of NCES library data reports. I recall my shock as I pulled together that information. I knew that NCES had issued some excellent library data reports, but was appalled at how spotty the program appeared when one looked for a body of statistical information.

I had worked with various NCES staff members over some years, and found them helpful, committed, and thoroughly professional. Yesterday you had briefings on the origins of the library statistics program. At the risk of repetition, I am going to mention a few key people in the course of this paper.

The first is Frank Schick, whom John Lorenz had hired when he became the head of the new HEW Library Services Branch. President Eisenhower had just signed the rural Library Services Act (LSA) of 1957. John recognized that it was critically important to document change, the extension and improvement of

services - and needs - under in the LSA program. As you may know, the original LSA was to have been a demonstration program and was to end in five years. The reporting was essential, not only because of that deadline, but also because Congress each year “saved” some money by appropriating only a part of the authorized funds. John needed a good statistics person!

Frank was an easily exasperated individual, very sharp, and he had little tolerance for people who did not understand the value of data. His accent and his intensity always reminded me of Henry Kissinger. Frank and his colleagues later moved from the Library Services Branch of the Office of Education to the statistical unit of the Office – predecessor to NCES.

In the 1970s, Frank recognized the importance of COSLA and met with us from time to time. Not all chief officers appreciated his contributions. I recall one chief who was obviously bored by discussion of data quality and coverage. The recollection reminds me of Judith Dench playing Queen Victoria expressing disdain and impatience with triviality. Nonetheless, some of us were impressed with his knowledge and his emphasis on standards.

He also made it possible to conduct the first 20th century survey of state library agencies in 1977 -- a survey conducted by Barratt Wilkins^{iv}. I say 20th century, because in 1876, the U.S. Department of Education produced a book of statistics and articles about libraries in the nation as part of the United States centennial year celebration^v.

So...

So, let's see where we are. It took 101 years to bring out the second report on state libraries, but only a few years after **Realities** to secure specific authority in Federal statutes for what is now the FSCS program

What a sea change in federal library data since 1984! As someone said, it's “all there on the NCES website!” And the website exemplifies the quality, usefulness, and timeliness of the NCES data for public policy research and other purposes.

What is “Public Policy” and What Difference do Data Make?

You have in your packets for this conference a reprint of two papers that the StLA Steering Committee used over the last year to discuss the value of the StLA data for public policy research. The first paper, used by the Steering Committee in December, 2000, dealt with views of “public policy,” concerns of policy analysts, and how they work. Briefly, the paper points out:

- “Public policy” may be understood as “how, why, and to what effect governments pursue particular courses of action and inaction”

- Public policy analyst concerns are:
 1. Problems, and the relation of public policies to those problems
 2. Content of public policies
 3. What decision-makers and policy makers do, or do not do
 4. Outputs and outcomes^{vi}

Since its inception, the StLA survey has been designed to meet the needs of five groups:

- Chief officers of state library agencies and their staffs
 - Policy makers in the executive and legislative branches of Federal and State governments
 - Government and library administrator at Federal, State, and local levels
 - ALA and its members and customers (who include members of the national press and staff of other education organizations)
 - Library and public policy researchers.
- Early on, the Steering Committee began to set aside meeting time to think about policy questions relating to state libraries. The questions we developed in 1997 and reviewed in 1999 appear in the appendix to the first paper. And in that first paper they are organized under the headings of *governance, *finance, and *functions and change. That paper focuses on a few questions about the extent to which survey questions need to be updated in the light of the digital information society.

The second paper is quite different -- it is a case study on the way in which StLA report data can be helpful in analyzing an actual policy question. That question centered on a change in governance proposed for one state library.

New York's governor asked the Legislature in 2000 and again in 2001 to remove the state library from the control of the Board of Regents and place it in a proposed new department budgeted within the Council on the Arts. The paper examines 1999 and 1994 StLA data for two groups of libraries:

- Twelve StLAs that meet one of both of two criteria: (1) they had total 1999 state income of 40 million or more, and/or (2) they operate a library of 600,000 or more volumes.
- Seven states which are located in "Cultural Departments" (the names of these departments vary)

I examined six kinds of data for the case study:

- Collections -numbers of volumes and numbers of subscriptions
- Staff - numbers of positions assigned to "library services" and to "library development and services" operations
- Electronic services development and resources

- Library development and services
- Income and expenditures, and sources of funds
- Governance information as summarized in the NCES “Highlights,” and the characteristics of StLAs in “cultural departments” as compared with the New York State library.

In Steering Committee discussion of the second paper, we agreed that:

- 1) The StLA data produced a surprising body of data useful in considering governance policy questions.
- 2) StLA data could be equally useful in researching various public policy questions related to StLA finance and “function and change.”
- 3) Most state librarians who have not used the StLA reports to address specific policy questions would be surprised at the value of the data they and their colleagues are providing.
- 4) There is no immediate need to revise the Committee’s 1997/99 governance policy questions.

Our Collective Impact on Public Policy

As far as I can tell, the FSCS Steering Committee has not adopted a statement of purpose for the public library survey or delineated its customer groups.

However, the law and various NCES documents use such language as :

- “...collect, analyze and disseminate statistics and other data related to education...”
- “Disseminating full and complete statistics on the condition and progress of education, at the preschool, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels...including data on libraries.”

Given this broad, yet specific, language, I expect that the customer groups of the public library, academic, and other library surveys likely generally parallel the customer groups we identified in the StLA statement of purpose.

In fact, library data over the years has been used in influencing, making, and changing public policy. Public policy at federal levels has been shaped in authorizing legislation, in appropriations, and at other points with the help and influence of ALA, COSLA, NCLIS, and other organizations using data from NCES and other sources. Some of this goes back more than 50 years.

Except for vocational education aid to the states following World War I, the 1957 Library Services Act was the first of a substantial series of education aid programs to the states . The National Defense Education Act and various subsequent education aid programs quickly followed LSA.

Before that mid-20th century start of broad education aid to the states, the federal education role was one largely of study. The first fulltime library expert in the

U.S. Office of Education was Ralph Dunbar, a persistent man of vision, who built a small staff in the 1930s and 1940s and laid groundwork for the LSA. Untiring librarians such as Nora E. Beust prepared booklists, articles, and tracts that helped advance public library service to children. Mary Helen Mahar led the way in informing school authorities, parent organizations, and others about the need for school libraries.

The library services unit grew with the successive developments of LSA, LSCA, and their expansions. Although the staff was never large, each staff member found collaborators in ALA, other organizations, library schools, and in the states (and sometimes with colleagues in other parts of the U.S. Office of Education). Their work and the data assembled by Frank Schick and his colleagues helped the successive directors of the ALA Washington Office; their presence at state library association conventions strengthened in-service training and awareness. Their work and data enabled chairs of the ALA Committee on Legislation to present fact and perspective in testimony in Congressional hearings that led to wider authorizations and appropriations.

But it seemed, at times, that progress, resources, and time were never enough. What keeps people “going” in times of disappointment? Belief in the values of library service, a vision of what “should be” – and determination that it “shall” be. In our society, public policy is one important means of bringing about a vision. I don’t know what discussions you may have had of public policy in relation to FSCS public library data. If you have had them, they likely have related to resources needed for quality library service, resources used, quality of service programs and even threats to public library service.

- Are electronic services reaching more people and making more of them users of the library?
- What relationship do expenditures for staff bear to services provided?
- Should public libraries be administered by contract for reasons of efficiency and for reasons of improved service?
- Is there a need for federal and increased state funds for updating and expanding library facilities?
- What are trends in circulation, reference, hours of service?

Today, library administrators, critics, public policy analysts, and academic researchers have access to the web-based data made possible by the remarkable cooperation among NCLIS, NCES, Census, and COSLA. That cooperation makes possible a new high in the quality, scope, and timeliness of public library and state library agency data, and a Library Statistics Program that is prudently expanding its coverage. One of the things I have observed about the chief partners in the library surveys is the high expectations for productive use of technology. “If this tool has shortcomings, let’s work on new designs.”

What follow-up to the **Realities** recommendation helped bring about this change? Hard work and persistence on the part of many individuals – and key interventions. One such intervention was the specific mandate for library data in the 1998 OERI reauthorization. Those key words, “including data on libraries” became part of NCES’ mandate.

Another, somewhat earlier, NCLIS staff initiative was that of Mary Alice Hedge, who convened every six months or so an informal meeting of people interested in, and working with, library statistics. I recall one such meeting where Peter Young, then a leader in statistics for LAMA first outlined his ideas – electricity filled the air in that meeting room. And, later, as NCLIS Executive Director, Peter’s lobbying with Carol Kindell and others in NCES helped prepare the way for today’s FSCS.

And you, the Data Coordinators, NCES Associate Commissioner Jeffrey Owings, Elaine Kroe, Denise Davis, MaryJo Lynch in her ALA role, and each of you in the FSCS Steering Committee are the Producers!

You producer because of your skill in interacting with people who supply data to you, your openness, and your continuous growth. Your push for further technological development produce data resources can be collected and used more easily.

A Complication – Limited Time

The FY 2000 StLA data show that the staff assigned to library statistics in the fifty state library agencies and the District of Columbia total 44.5 FTE.

Table 1
Staff Assigned to Library Statistics
in 50 states and DC
(in FTE)

Total staff	44.5
ALA-MLS librarians	25.3
“Other professionals”	6.0
“Other paid staff”	13.2

Four states have .01 (1/10 of one percent) total FTE staff.
An additional 12 states have less than .05 total FTE staff.

Table 14g State Library Agencies Fiscal Year 2000

Table 2
Compared with other categories of StLA staff,
the library statistics group is one of the smallest:
(in FTE)

Automation/electronic network development/ telecommunications	247.2
Administration of LSTA grants	83.7
Administration of state aid	62.1
Institutional library services	59.1
Children's/young adult services	56.1
Marketing/communications	55.2
Library statistics	44.5
Literacy program support	34.8

Table series 14, State Library Agencies Fiscal Year 2000

StLAs have reported an overall increase in staff since 1995. In FY 1995, they reported a total staff of 3,602 FTE. The FY 2000 data show a total staff of 4,053 FTE, an increase of 450 positions (or 12.5 percent). The staff assigned to library statistics in the same period increased by 8.5 positions (from 36.0 FTE in 1995 to 44.5 FTE in 2000 (an increase of 23.6 percent).

Cheerleading is an Investment

Hats off to you for doing so much in so little time! I realize that, with the current budget cuts in state library agencies, staff resources are even tighter. But let me also suggest that the very fact of multiple assignments in today's work place offers possibilities for you to help colleagues know and use data. If anyone in your agency is familiar with the E.D. Tabs, it is likely to be you.

Any program needs its cheerleaders. Cheerleading is an investment that can generate use of, and respect for, the data you produce.

Denise Davis and her colleagues at NCLIS show the value of cheerleading -- with information they provide at the right moment, reminders of data available, support for needed specific studies, and NCLIS WebPages links to NCES and other data sources. NCLIS cheerleads for library data through its releases, citing library data it in publications, and making it easy for its WebPages users find library data.

Another, but yet-too-small, group of cheerleaders is composed of the researchers who use NCES data, cite it, and recommend the data to other researchers.

Data Coordinators are cheerleaders when they re-post NCES releases on statewide e-lists and in forums. They are cheerleaders, too, when they help the public information officer of their state library agency (or the state association) use facts from new NCES publications. Such help may be as simple as providing a copy of the highlights from an E.D.Tabs, along with specific information about how their state compares with national data.

A portion of your precious work time devoted to examining NCES data in relation to functions and concerns in your state can lead to cheerleading important to your chief officer. For public library data, you have the advantage of the "Public Library Peer Comparison Tool." I hope that soon we shall have the same kind of software in the website for StLA comparisons -- and, even better, a way of linking the two data bases in making comparisons.

Keep up the great work! And perhaps do so with a new motto:
"Producer of Excellent Data; Cheerleader for its Use"

11/30/01

Notes on Sources

ⁱ “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform” A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education by The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office.

ⁱⁱ Members of the task force were: Rebecca T. Bingham, Elizabeth B. Day, William DeJohn, Richard M. Dougherty, Virginia H. Matthews, Donald Sager, Joseph F. Shubert (Chair), Peggy Sullivan and Eileen D. Cooke.

ⁱⁱⁱ “Realities: Educational Reform in a Learning Society: A statement by the American Library Association Task Force on Excellence in Education.” Chicago: American Library Association, 1984. (This report also appeared in “The Bookmark” published by the New York State Library, Fall 1984, pp 45-52.

^{iv} “Survey of State Library Agencies, 1977.” Prepared by the National Center of Education Statistics, Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Published by the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science in 1979 as Number 142 – Bonus of the School’s “Occasional Papers.”

^v “StLA Data and Public Policy Questions, A Paper to Assist in Steering Committee Discussion, December 7, 2000.” By Joseph F. Shubert, p1.

^{vi} “State Library Agencies, Fiscal Year 2000” Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, National Center for Education Statistics E.D. Tabs, November 2001. Table 14G and other Table 14 series. Washington, U.S. Government Printing Office, Department of Education Office of Education Research and Improvement.